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**Cinematic Representations of Nationalist-Religious Ideology  
in Serbian Films during the 1990s**

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Doctor of Philosophy  
The University of Edinburgh  
March  
2009

## **THESIS DECLARATION FORM**

This thesis is being submitted for the degree of PhD, at the University of Edinburgh.

I hereby certify that this PhD thesis is my own work and I am responsible for its contents. I confirm that this work has not previously been submitted for any other degree.

This thesis is the result of my own independent research, except where stated.

Other sources used are properly acknowledged.

Milja Radovic

March 2009, Edinburgh

## **Abstract of the Thesis**

This thesis is a critical exploration of Serbian film during the 1990s and its potential to provide a critique of the regime of Slobodan Milosevic. In this dissertation I focus upon how selected films provide insight into the ideological discourse of the 1990s within the Serbian socio-political and cultural context. I discuss a range of Serbian films produced during the 1990s, and I analyse in detail several films, in particular *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* (*Lepa sela, lepo gore*, Srdjan Dragojevic, 1995) and *Wounds* (*Rane*, Srdjan Dragojevic, 1998), in which I focus on the depiction of nationalist and religious elements in the films. I analyse cinematic representations of the nationalist-religious ideology, its characteristics, impacts and promotion. On the basis of this analysis I consider the extent to which these cinematic representations are subversive.

My dissertation has seven chapters. In chapter 1, which is an introduction to the thesis, I state my research questions and methodology. In chapter 2 I discuss the research context and I consider literature relevant to my research. Since I am basing my research upon different fields, I divide this chapter into three parts: the first one is devoted to the field of film and religion in which I position this study; the second part is on the literature that I used for the exploration of the socio-political context of the 1990s; and the last part is devoted to literature written on Balkan, Yugoslav and Serbian cinema. In chapter 3 I provide an analysis of the Serbian socio-cultural and political context of the 1990s. Chapter 3 is divided into eight parts, in which I primarily focus on the creation, characteristics and impacts of the nationalist-religious ideology. This discussion includes an analysis of the interaction between the Church and the state in the promotion of this ideological discourse. This chapter is important for the further analysis of Serbian film, its contextualization, and understanding the main issues which films communicated. In chapter 4 I analyse Serbian films produced during the 1990s. In the first part of this chapter, and for the purpose of contextualization of Serbian film, I first briefly discuss the cinematic tradition of former Yugoslavia: the *Black Wave* movement. I move on to discuss the cinematic context of the 1990s and the films produced over this period of time. I particularly focus on several films which dealt with the political-ideological context of the 1990s. I discuss the most significant films which dealt with the war, violence, ideology and the collapse of Serbian society under the Milosevic regime. The aim of this chapter is to provide a cinematic context for the

analysed films and a clearer understanding of Serbian film of the 1990s as politically engaged cinema. Chapter 5 is devoted to the film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* while in chapter 6 I analyse the film *Wounds*. I analyse these two films separately because of their unique depictions of the nationalist-religious ideology. Both chapters are structured the same way and are divided into two major parts. In the first part of each chapter I consider the film's plot, its genre and its production, as well as discussing the film's critical reception. In the second part of each chapter I analyse the film narrative and images. At the end of each chapter I discuss the results of my analysis. Chapter 7 is the last chapter of my thesis and is devoted to the conclusion. In this final chapter I discuss the findings based on the cinematic and contextual analysis in the previous chapters. As part of my final remarks, I outline the contributions this study has made and future research that can be developed on the basis of this thesis.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.0. Serbia as a Focus of the Study**

This thesis is an interdisciplinary study of Serbian film during the 1990s and its potential to provide a critique of the dominant political regime. There are several reasons why I chose to concentrate upon Serbian film and its potential to provide ideological criticism. I became interested in exploring the films from my own country partly because of the way in which they dealt with the Yugoslav conflict and the political ideology of the Milosevic regime. My interest is in the local political ideology of the 1990s and its cinematic depiction. It proved useful to study the films that were produced in Serbia, investigating how domestic filmmakers portrayed the ideology and whether they expressed any criticism in their depictions. I have discovered that Serbian cinema is a rich resource for exploration of the cinematic representation of religion and nationalism, which has been largely overlooked in studies on Serbian cinema. The cinematic depiction of the nationalist-religious ideology of the 1990s and the possible subversiveness of such representation is the focus of this study.

I decided to focus on the representation of religion and nationalism because, as I demonstrate later, these two elements lie at the core of Milosevic's populist political ideology. The nationalist-religious ideology that I discuss in this thesis, has been a permanent problem of Serbian society from the 1980s until the present, surviving many political twists, including Milosevic's downfall in 2000. This ideological discourse is still supported by some of the leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church, academics and a significant number of political parties in Serbia. In this sense, nationalist-religious ideology, that proved to be such a powerful weapon in the

1990s, still echoes through Serbian socio-political and cultural life and is connected to many ongoing issues. Only in the time of writing up this thesis, from 2005 to 2008, several important events happened that are closely related to this study: Slobodan Milosevic died in Scheveningen in the Hague (2006), Montenegro became an independent state (2006), Kosovo declared its independence (2008), which resulted in an escalation of violence in the Belgrade streets led by the prime minister Vojislav Kostunica, the main advocate of nationalist-religious ideology of post-Milosevic Serbia, who lost the elections held in 2008; and finally, Radovan Karadzic was arrested and put on trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the Hague. The reactions to some of these events by certain political parties, media and the wider population reveal that this ideology that was formed in the late 1980s still has strong influences on Serbian society.

The Serbian Orthodox Church, whose political role is also an element of this study, reacted strongly to some of these recent events revealing that loyalty to the concept of nationalist-religious ideology has not been abandoned yet. The Church in Serbia is now faced with important changes embodied in the question of whether it should continue its hard-line conservative nationalist-religious program, known from the 1990s, or whether it should undertake serious reforms and open up for ecumenical dialogue. In spite of some positive signs that Serbia is finally divorcing itself from its dark past of the Milosevic time, many issues need to be resolved for this to happen. Serbia is in the process of so-called European integration, but the current socio-political context reveals ideological clashes within Serbian society. Although the citizens clearly voted for the pro-European political course, the Serbian elite is divided between those who are against the EU and advocate a so-called sovereign democracy based upon the premises of the nationalist-religious ideology from the Milosevic-era and those who are of liberal, pro-European political orientation. As in Milosevic's time, the mainstream media since 2000 has often been promoting anti-EU ideas, denying Serbian responsibility for the war crimes in Croatia and Bosnia (and therefore aggravating the process of reconciliation in the Balkans) and has continued to recognize war-criminals as national heroes. At the same time the

independent media and journalists have been exposed to physical attacks several times over the past few years. Corruption and crime inherited from the Milosevic-era require urgent political solutions, such as regulation of the judicial system for example, which only the substantial reforms that form a part of European integrations can provide. While some of Milosevic's ideologists, academics, Church leaders and politicians are looking towards Russia, Serbian citizens, as their votes in the last elections confirmed, are looking towards Europe. Serbia is still waiting to be considered as a possible candidate for the EU. In this sense, the problem of the nationalist-religious ideology, whose cinematic representations I investigate in this thesis, is still very much alive and connected to the contemporary socio-political context in Serbia.

Many studies have been written on the break-up of Yugoslavia.<sup>1</sup> Although some of them dealt with religion, national myths, or the role of the Church in the conflict, I found a lack of systematic study that would connect all these elements and discuss the ideological aspects of the Church, the socio-political impacts of its interaction with the state, and the representation of Orthodoxy in popular culture and film in particular. Although there are important works and studies on Serbian cinema of the 1990s, which I discuss in this thesis, they all lack the themes that lie at the core of this research: the analysis of religion and nationalism in the films. In this sense this thesis is a pioneering work.

Finally my personal relationship to the subject had considerable significance in directing my research interests. I was born and raised in Yugoslavia, but after its break-up, Serbia is now officially considered as my country of origin, since I am a native of Belgrade. The experience that I gained from living in Serbia in the troubled

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<sup>1</sup> Bennet, Christopher: *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, London: Hurst & Company, 1996; Duijzings, Ger: *Religion and the Politics of the Identity in Kosovo*, London: Hurst & Company, 2000; Jovic, Dejan: *Jugoslavija – drzava koja je odumrla: uspon, kriza i pad Cetrte Jugoslavije*, Beograd: Samizdat, 2003; Judah, Tim: *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2000; Perica, Vjekoslav: *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002; Popov, Nebojsa: *Srpska strana rata*, Beograd: Bigz, 1996; Silber, Laura and Little, Allan: *Yugoslavia Death of a Nation*, USA: TV Books Inc, 1995; Thomas, Robert: *Serbia Under Milosevic, Politics in the 1990s*, London: Hurst & Company, 1999.

times that I describe in this thesis were beneficial in many ways for my work. I deal with issues and events to which I was a direct witness. Studying at the Theological Faculty of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade during the time of the regime provided me with an insight into how the Church perceived national issues and how it contributed to the creation of religious ideology, which represents a divorce from what many believe to be the Orthodox tradition and a deviation of its *praxis*.<sup>2</sup> After Milosevic's downfall and assuming that the socio-political situation changed, I continued masters studies at the same faculty. The obstacles with which I was faced made me the first unofficial dissident of the Theological Faculty in Belgrade, and helped me to understand that things cannot be changed "overnight." I started looking for scholarships to come abroad and continue my research and education in a safer and better environment. The day when I took the IELTS language test at the British Consulate in Belgrade, which was a pre-condition for my enrolment at the University of Edinburgh, was the day when the first democratic Serbian Prime Minister, Dr Zoran Djindjic, was buried. With Djindjic's assassination it seemed that Serbia had returned to the Milosevic era and that much more time would be needed for a true recovery of Serbian society. At the time when I left my country, many people had lost the hope and enthusiasm that they had after Milosevic's downfall. I left Serbia in 2004: a chance to continue my education, improve my academic knowledge and be able to speak freely was a gift to me, but I also left with the hope that through my work I can speak on behalf of those who stayed.

I also need to say that my interest in media and film has a long history: during my time at high school I studied film history and I still remember the delight with which I gazed at the first camera of the Lumière brothers that is kept in the Yugoslav Film Archive in Belgrade. My work experience on an independent TV station in Belgrade where I was a TV editor during the 1990s, together with my particular love and interest in film, shaped and directed my research interests and encouraged me in my academic work. This thesis is a result of all these elements.

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2 For a more detailed explanation see chapters 2 and 3.

### 1.0.1. The Focus of this Thesis and Research Questions

At the heart of this study is an analysis of the range of Serbian films produced in the 1990s. The films I discuss in this thesis were also screened abroad and were present at many International Film Festivals. My initial personal intuition was that these films act subversively. As has become clear through careful study of these films the representation is far more ambiguous than I first thought. The ways in which the films were received and reinterpreted suggest that while the directors may have intended these films to act as a critical response to the regime in fact they were sometimes perceived as pro-regime films.

In this thesis I focus upon the question of how Serbian films of the 1990s can inform us about the ideological discourse of the Milosevic regime. In other words, the central focus of my analysis is on the cinematic representation of the nationalist-religious ideology that lay at the core of the political ideology of the 1990s. The films I analyze in chapters 5 and 6 in greater detail, *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* (*Lepa sela, lepo gore*, Srdjan Dragojevic, 1995) and *Wounds* (*Rane*, Srdjan Dragojevic, 1998), I selected because I find them to be the most representative in the depiction of national and religious issues, symbols and images. These are popular and well-known films in Serbia, but also in the other former Yugoslav republics. I break my research question into several sub-questions necessary for detailed analysis and for answering the main question. In this sense, I look further at how religion and religious issues are depicted in the selected films, how they are linked to nationalism, how this depiction informs us about religion and its importance for the regime's ideology, and finally how these films depict the promotion and impacts of the nationalist-religious ideology on Serbian society.

My next, but not less important question is whether the representations of nationalist-religious ideology are subversive or whether those films are simply reflecting the ideological context in which they were made. In other words, did the films frame the ideology or did the ideology frame the films? If it is the case that we consider this



cinematic representation to be subversive, we would consider them to be films that tend to “escape” the ideological context that frames them, and speak from a critical point of view. In this case could we consider Serbian films to be a form of ideological critique? In this thesis I will suggest that several Serbian films in a subtle way interrogated the ideology of violence of the 1990s.

It is important to identify what I mean by subversive cinema. In the first place this refers to political subversion, or to be more precise: subversion of the dominant political ideology of the 1990s. I will investigate different ways in which cinema subverts this political ideology by analysing film narrative, characterization, images and symbols, and their changing and at times ambiguous meaning in the films' context. It is important to distinguish between resistance and subversiveness. Resistance involves a call to revolution whereas subversiveness involves an invitation to reconsider ideology. Subversiveness sometimes attacks indirectly, sometimes undermines. It is always subtle and it relies on ambiguity. On the other hand, the cinema of resistance has the potential to change the filmic style and reject prevailing ideological aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> The prevailing aesthetics in a society can often reflect a society's dominant ideology. On the other hand, the cinema of subversion adopts the society's aesthetics and its filmmaking style to use it subtly as a tool of subversion when it is required.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that I am dealing with ambiguous films which were made during the civil war and in an internationally isolated and economically exhausted Serbia under the Milosevic regime. Because of its ambiguity and its historical proximity to the conflict, the reception of these films, as we will see further, was very diverse. The debates of film critics and scholars raised the question of politically correct and incorrect films, which is one of the problems that I discuss in my thesis. In spite of the fact that critics and scholars discussed the political aspects

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<sup>3</sup> This is the case with the *Black Wave*. See chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> I will discuss the cinematic subversiveness in Serbian cinema in chapter 2, sections 2.3.1. and 2.3.2. In chapters 4, 5 and 6 I investigate different forms of cinematic subversion through the analysis of film narrative, images and symbols. In my concluding chapter, in section 7.3., I narrow down the main points on subversive elements in Serbian film of the 1990s based on results of my analysis.

of the films, they overlooked the cinematic depiction of religion and its link to nationalism, which is an unavoidable part of a discussion on the political ideology of the 1990s. In this thesis I aim to fill the gap in the existing readings of Serbian film. My study is pertinent for those scholars who consider issues of nationalism, identity and religion in the Balkans and in Serbia as a part of that.

## **1.1. Methodology**

The main focus of this thesis are several Serbian films which I analyze in detail in order to answer my research questions. Since this study is interdisciplinary by nature, my approach to the subject involves a combination of different methods, which will be discussed in this chapter. My methodology can be considered as a cultural studies approach which was advocated among recent scholars of film and religion by Melanie Wright.<sup>5</sup> A multidimensional aspect is at the core of such an approach and of this thesis. Multi-dimensionality is reflected in the wide range of different research done for this thesis which involved diverse fields and resources, interviews and application of textual and contextual analysis, analysis of images, and critical reception. My aim is to investigate and provide an answer to the primary questions of this thesis and thus provide a better understanding of the films but also of the ideological context of the 1990s and the interconnection between ideology and film. The first section of this chapter, 1.1.1. is devoted to the methodological approaches to the film analysis. In section 1.1.2. I discuss the contextual analysis which refers to the socio-political background and analysis of the nationalist-religious ideology. In section 1.1.3. I discuss methodological approaches to the film analysis.

### **1.1.1. Cultural Studies Approach to Cinema**

The focus of this thesis is an in-depth analysis of two Serbian films, selected as representative samples in accordance with my research questions. My methodology can be characterized as a cultural studies approach to cinema, due to the combination

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<sup>5</sup> Wright, Melanie: *Religion and Film: An Introduction*, London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007.

of different methods employed in the analysis. A cultural studies approach in the field of film and religion has been advocated by scholars such as Margaret Miles,<sup>6</sup> John Lyden<sup>7</sup> and as mentioned before, Melanie Wright. My work reflects the multidimensionality which Wright proposed, in several aspects. First, the socio-political and ideological context, as explained in the previous section, is analyzed in order to contextualize Serbian film but also aiming to introduce the readers to the characteristics of the ideology whose cinematic representation will be explored in subsequent chapters. Such an approach into the analysis of the films enabled me to bring specialist knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Second, my selection of films is done in accordance with the stated research questions, which means that the films are relevant to the questions in hand.<sup>9</sup> Third, I consider film text, context, images and film music as equally important in my analysis. It can be considered therefore that I approach the films as *cultural text* (my italics) which as such can inform us about the ideological discourse of the Milosevic regime and the political ideology of the 1990s. Treating film as a cultural text means also that I investigate how the films can inform us about the context in which they were made. In this sense, I allow the films to “speak for themselves.” Adopting a cultural studies approach enabled me to combine analysis of different aspects of the films, such as contextual, narrative and visual analysis, including the analysis of the critical responses to the films and ideological criticism of the films. In the next sections I will discuss these different approaches that I used in my research.

### 1.1.2. Contextual Analysis

The contextual analysis is an important aspect of this study for several reasons which will be discussed here. First it is important to identify what I mean by “contextual analysis”. I consider two aspects: first, the contextualization of the film text and

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6 Miles, Margaret: *Seeing is Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

7 Lyden, John: *Film as Religion*, New York: University Press, 2003.

8 Wright argued that religious scholars can enrich discussion on film by bringing in aspects that might be overlooked by film scholars. For this discussion see Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p.30.

9 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p.19.

image within the wider context of the film, and second, the analysis of the socio-political context of the 1990s (chapter 3). The final aim of this analysis is to contextualize these Serbian films within the specific socio-political and cultural context of the 1990s and to explore how this context is reflected in the films. Only then is it possible to consider whether or not the films subvert the ideological context in which they were produced. Regarding the contextualization of the text and image, it means primarily that the film images, symbols, characters, music and dialogue are not considered as a separate entity but that they are placed and analysed within the complex film structure.

To acknowledge all these cinematic devices as interdependent is a starting point for further analysis of their meaning. The second aspect of contextual analysis involves contextualizing the film and its main topic within the concrete cultural and socio-political time in Serbia. In this sense, the analysis of Serbian films and answering my research questions would not be possible without an analysis of the socio-political context of the 1990s, or to be more precise, of the formation and characteristics of the political ideology of the Milosevic regime.

The analysis of the socio-political context is given in Chapter 3, in which I aim first to explain what nationalist-religious ideology is and how it was used for political purposes, and second to describe the context in which Serbian films were made. Understanding this ideological and political context is essential for reading the films and the cinematic representation of the ideology. I analyse the complex interaction between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state, as well as the origins, formation and impacts of the nationalist-religious ideology within the Church. For the first part of my research, which refers to the state, I use literature that is relevant to this topic and that is discussed separately in chapter 2, the literature review. I selected works which dealt with the time period of the formation of the political ideology and the rise of Slobodan Milosevic. I analyse the new political discourse that prevailed in the late 1980s and that was introduced by Milosevic's political apparatus. My focus is on the nationalist character of this political discourse and the introduction of

mythological and religious elements into the political statements and speeches. I selected some crucial socio-political events and I focus upon those which were most significant for the subject explored, such as the celebration of the six hundredth anniversary of the battle in Kosovo in 1989, when both the Church and the state showed the most significant unity around the Serbian national question. The reason for focusing upon the 1980s is because this was the time when nationalist-religious ideology came to the fore and was probably at its strongest, since Milosevic later lost the support of the Church, or at least a part of the Church, especially after the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed. The nationalist-religious discourse could be described as “hate speech” and was a catalyst for the war. For this part of my research and for the purposes of my discussion of the socio-political background in Chapter 3 I used the Archive of the National Library of Serbia, where I considered articles from editions of the newspaper *Politika*, published in 1989. Analysis of these articles clarified how the media were shaping this ideological discourse and thus how they were used as a powerful tool in the propaganda of the Milosevic regime. Analysis of these texts shows not only a shift from the communist principles of Tito's Yugoslavia to hard core nationalism but also how for the first time since World War II the state newspapers devoted significant space to the Church and Orthodoxy. I also analyse the context in which religious themes emerged, as well as the popular representation of Orthodoxy, emergence of national myths, mythological language and pseudo-historical content of the political speeches. Such political propaganda was used to support the process of hegemonization and to provide justification for Milosevic's radical political program.

It was useful to compare these articles to those published by the Serbian Orthodox Church during the same period of time. Most relevant articles are already quoted in studies by other Serbian scholars, mainly in Radmila Radic's *Crkva i srpsko pitanje* (*The Church and the Serbian National Question*, my translation).<sup>10</sup> Applying a comparative method when approaching these texts, published both by the state and the Church, enabled me to find similarities and differences between them in public

<sup>10</sup> Radic, Radmila: “Crkva i srpsko pitanje” in Popov, Nebojsa, ed.: *Srpska strana rata*, Beograd: Bigz, 1996.

discourse and thus to understand how the nationalist-religious ideology was communicated in the public sphere. This was important for discussing the impacts of such ideological discourse on Serbian society and its contribution to national hegemony, which in turn enabled Milosevic to realize his political plans. Studies and publications on media propaganda and on the socio-political role of independent media were extremely helpful in defining the role of the media in the conflict and in the spread of ideology through the public sphere. They also contributed to contextualizing my discussion within the Serbian cultural milieu that contained voices of resistance that expressed strong criticism against the regime and the official ideology.

My exploration of the nationalist-religious ideology formed within the Church includes analysis of different texts written by theologians such as Nikolaj Velimirovic, who established some of its main principles. His work resonates in later works and ideas of prominent theologians and leading bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church. How these ideas were shaped into a specific ideology that became a political programme of the Church in the 1990s, and how it interacted with the political ideology of the state is a part of the separate discussion in chapter 3.

For the purpose of this thesis I also used original documents, such as the *Memorandum* of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which is available on-line both in Serbian and in English. My research includes other relevant documents available on-line, such as reports of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, on nationalism and religion. Interviews, on-line articles, and radio programmes such as *Pescanik* B92, which gathered different scholars around discussions on Serbian nationalism and the religious issues, are also included in my research. It is important to note that I read all the data in Serbian, some of them I translated myself and where available I used the existing English translations.

### 1.1.3. (A) Narrative Analysis

My analysis can be considered partially as a narrative analysis because it includes a discussion of the storyline, plot, characters and their interaction.<sup>11</sup> As Bordwell suggests, although a theory of narration is “drawn from the mimetic tradition”<sup>12</sup> it goes beyond this because “a narrative film represents story events through the vision of an invisible or imaginary witness.”<sup>13</sup> The modes of narration and its alternatives need to be acknowledged as an important aspect of film theory and in discussion of film narrative.<sup>14</sup> Bordwell however criticized the tendency of focusing on “certain film techniques” or “isolated narrative devices at the expense of the whole film.”<sup>15</sup> In my analysis I focus only partially on narrative since for example I do not consider specific film techniques or spectatorship. I focus rather on elements such as the plot, storyline, film text and dialogues, characters, and setting. I also consider the narrative patterns such as flashbacks and parallel stories in films. In my analysis I contextualize these narratives in the film. In other words, I connect what can be analysed as isolated elements to the wider context of the film in order to discuss their meaning.

The narrative analysis is important for this study for several reasons. The film text is an important resource for understanding the ideological discourse of that time. Its full meaning however is revealed through interaction with other elements of the film narrative, and also in the visual expressions. The film text as such can inform us on the cultural matrix of the 1990s. Careful analysis of the film text can reveal whether it reflects or subverts the ideological assumptions of the time. The analysis of the characters is important for several reasons. The characters often reflect specific social groups. They are a device through which the ideological discourse that shapes their actions and world-view is expressed. For example, in chapter 6, the analysis of

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11 See Bordwell, David: *Narration in the Fiction Film*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 157.

12 Bordwell, David: *Ibid*, p. 9

13 Bordwell, David: *Ibid*, p. 9.

14 Bordwell considers different meanings of the term “mode”, suggesting the theoretical connection to Aristotelian “mode of imitation.” See Bordwell, David: *Ibid*, p.150. For a different model of narration see also p.150-334.

15 Bordwell, David: *Ibid*, Introduction, xiii.

the characters of the film *Wounds*, reveals social and cultural conflicts and the complex issue of identity in the post-Tito era. The identification of the main characters with the criminals shows the vital role of ideological fantasies in creating a “dominant fiction” which “present a mirror for group identification” and which resulted in “the loss of reality and ideological fantasies.”<sup>16</sup> The characters also inform us about the perception of women in the culture of the 1990s and the interconnection between religion and nationalism, issues that will be explored in chapters 5 and 6.

Storyline is another important element that I consider in this study. The storyline of *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* was changed several times during the shooting of the film, even becoming a political issue.<sup>17</sup> The film montage, the use of flashbacks in creating parallel stories is characteristic of Dragojevic's films, and has an important place in structuring the narrative. “A narrative of dark spaces” in Serbian films has the metaphorical function of representing Serbian society. These metaphors, as Igor Krstic argues “have to be interpreted by means of their sub-contexts.”<sup>18</sup> These are all elements that will be considered in my analysis as they reveal important and often overlooked aspects of the films.

### 1.1.3. (B) Visual Analysis

The work of Melanie Wright drew attention to the importance of considering other elements in film analysis, such as the film's language.<sup>19</sup> In this study I analyse visual language of the film, images, symbols, and *mise-en-scene*.<sup>20</sup> In my analysis I give consideration to the film's music, which in the case of the Serbian films has a similar function to images: it is a part of the sub-text of the film, which inform us about the ideological context just as much as the film text does.

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16 Krstic, Igor: *Re-thinking Serbia: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture*, Other Voices, V.2, N.2, (March 2002), <http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/krstic/index.html>

17 See Iordanova, Dina: *Cinema of Flames*, London: British Film Institute, 2001, p. 143. This problem will be discussed in chapter 5.

18 Krstic emphasizes the importance of considering of the “relationship between historical trauma and fantasy.” See Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

19 See Wright, Melanie: *Ibid.*

20 See Hayward, Susan: *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, London: Routledge, 1996.



In terms of visual analysis I focus on the national and religious images and symbols in the films. I consider the religious images and their traditional meaning in Orthodoxy and the shift in their meaning and interpretation in the popular culture of the 1990s as it is represented in the films. Religious symbols often become national symbols. It is important to analyse this cinematic representation for two reasons. First, to discuss how the films depicted the connection between religion and nationalism, and second to explore the possible subversive aspects of such representations. If we analyse the religious imagery separately from the context of the film, as an independent entity, we may find that these images primarily communicate their sacred meaning. When they are observed within the specific setting in which they are placed, however, their meaning can change. James Monaco argued that the single image does not constitute the basic unit of meaning in film.<sup>21</sup> I propose in this thesis that the reading of religious images and further discussion on their function have to be considered only within the film's wider context. In this sense I explore the new meaning that these images receive within the cinematic context. For instance, a religious image such as the cross or the *Last Supper*, which is a part of the *Wounds' mise-en-scene*, in a Christian context communicate certain sacramental meanings. If we observe them not as isolated elements but within the film context, their meaning changes, revealing completely new aspects.<sup>22</sup> In this sense I investigate the shift of sacred images to social symbols, which David Morgan discusses.<sup>23</sup> This shift framed by the camera's eye reflects the actual changes in the society of the 1990s, for which reason it is important to contextualize this discussion of cinematic depictions within the wider socio-political context of the 1990s.

My analysis as previously mentioned includes the *mise-en-scene*. *Mise-en-scene* in film criticism is primarily considered as “the modification of space.”<sup>24</sup> According to Jean-Luc Godard *mise-en-scene* can be “as expressionistic as montage”<sup>25</sup>, and as its

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21 Monaco, James: *How to Read a Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History, and Theory of Film and Media*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.129.

22 See Morgan, David: *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005.

23 Morgan, David: *Ibid*.

24 Monaco, James: *Ibid*, p.142

25 Monaco, James: *Ibid*, p.146.

final aim can be considered the expression of “psychological reality that transcends physical, plastic reality.”<sup>26</sup> Igor Krstic who uses a psychoanalytic approach to Serbian films of the 1990s recognizes *mise-en-scene* as desire since it reflects unconscious fantasies.<sup>27</sup> In my analysis I focus on *mise-en-scene* as a communicator of metaphorical meaning that resembles cultural reality. Religious symbols constitute an important part of films' *mise-en-scene*. This is particularly the case with the film *Wounds*. *Mise-en-scene* in this case “illustrates the self-destructive drive of the protagonists.”<sup>28</sup> It not so much provides religious criticism as much as pointing to the deviation, the loss of values and moral boundaries within Serbian society. The presence of Christ's image in *Wounds* witnesses in a metaphorical way to the absence of Christ. It transcends the image of a godless society, by representing “the theme of the living dead.”<sup>29</sup> This society is paradoxically at the same time overwhelmed with Orthodox iconography, which in the end communicates only violence and self-destruction. Therefore the presence of Christ's image in the *mise-en-scene* has a reverse function, to signify the destruction and absence of personal and collective ethics in a society ruled by the ideology of violence, destruction and hate towards others.

The films' images therefore have “culturally determined connotations.”<sup>30</sup> As James Monaco suggested “the shot is the word of film, the scene its sentence and the sequence its paragraph”<sup>31</sup>, all of which are placed in a complex order that communicates certain meaning. In this study I focus upon visual expressions of the films in order to define their connection to the narrative and to explore the meaning they constitute.

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26 Monaco, James: *Ibid*, p.146.

27 See Krstic, Igor: *Ibid*.

28 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid*.

29 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid*.

30 Monaco, James: *Ibid*, p.131.

31 Monaco, James: *Ibid*, p.129.

### 1.1.3. (C) Critical Responses to the Films

It is important to say that “media reception theory” identifies the audience as an “active, involved public.”<sup>32</sup> In the field of media, religion and culture there has been a shift towards the analysis of the audience reception.<sup>33</sup> Stewart Hoover in his study *Religion in the Media Age* demonstrates the importance of considering the audience in determining how media consumption interacts with the religious and cultural life.<sup>34</sup> A similar trend shows in the field of film and religion where scholars such as Clive Marsh,<sup>35</sup> Christopher Deacy<sup>36</sup> and Gaye Ortiz<sup>37</sup> have emphasized the importance of examining the participative role of the audience.

Audience research forms a part this thesis. The response of scholars and film critics constitutes an important part of my research and it provides a framework for further discussion of the films. In fact by reviewing the reception by scholars and critics I shed light on the controversial reception of the debated films. The critical reception, discussed in this thesis, is valuable to consider because of the diverse, and sometimes extreme reactions that followed these films. Looking at the critical reception was also helpful for identifying major issues connected to these films and narrowing down my discussion. My research on critical reception included different sources. In the first place I referred to books published on Serbian films, such as *Cinema of Flames* by Dina Iordanova,<sup>38</sup> and different texts mostly by Serbian authors published in on-line journals. I also included film critiques and reviews from different countries, from

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32 Pearson, E. Roberta and Simpson, Philip: *Critical Dictionary of Film and Television Theory*, [http://books.google.com/books?id=bBj1HsOpS9wC&pg=PA352&lpg=PA352&dq=habermas+on+film&source=web&ots=OJ8treB4mV&sig=nSgdqAQbKCZFovF-JVgWsuAYcFQ&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=7&ct=result#PPA354,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=bBj1HsOpS9wC&pg=PA352&lpg=PA352&dq=habermas+on+film&source=web&ots=OJ8treB4mV&sig=nSgdqAQbKCZFovF-JVgWsuAYcFQ&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=7&ct=result#PPA354,M1), p. 354; Last accessed: 17/11/2008.

33 See Mitchell, Jolyon: “Emerging Conversations in the Study of Media, Religion and Culture” in Mitchell, Jolyon and Marriage, Sophia eds.: *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Religion, Media and Culture*, London: T & T Clark, 2003, p. 337-350.

34 Hoover, Stewart: *Religion in the Media Age*, London, New York: Routledge, 2006.

35 Marsh, Clive: *Cinema and Sentiment, Film's Challenge to Theology*, Milton Keynes UK & Waynesboro, USA: Paternoster, 2004.

36 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Theology and Film: Challenging the Sacred/Secular Divide*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

37 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid.*

38 Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid.*, 2001.

former Yugoslavia to foreign ones, that are available on-line, on different web sites. I have also included personal interviews with relevant film critics, directors and professors.

For the purpose of this study I also interviewed the director of the selected films, Srdjan Dragojevic, German film critic Bernd Buder, who specialized in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav cinema, and professor from the Faculty of Drama in Belgrade, writer and screenwriter Filip David. All interviews were conducted through email. Each was structured differently, according to the specialized knowledge of the interviewee. In the interview with director Srdjan Dragojevic my aim was to shed light on the circumstances in which films were made, find out the original motifs and intentions of the director in order to provide some of the answers to my research questions. One of the issues I sought to identify through the interviews was the extent to which the director was aware of the ideological framework and influences in the process of filmmaking and how the representation of some of the issues differs from the ideological context. I was also interested to know whether the director criticized religion *intentionally* or whether he simply depicted it as an existing facet of society.

#### 1.1.3. (D) Ideological Criticism

Because of their political aspects Serbian films were widely discussed both by scholars and critics. Through my research on the representation of nationalist-religious ideology I was faced with questions about the ways in which film can act critically towards the dominant ideology and whether it is capable of escaping the ideological frame in which it was made. This is one of the key questions in my thesis that inevitably arises out of my primary research questions, and which will be discussed throughout this thesis. Because of my analysis of the cinematic depiction of ideology it can be considered that I approach these films as ideological critique of the 1990s political regime. In this sense we can say that “*every film is political*”, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it (or within which it is

produced).”<sup>39</sup> The next issue, that connects to my question of the films' subversiveness, is whether this is possible in the case when film operates within the particular ideological framework of its time and additionally adopts, in the case of national cinema, global stereotypes embodied in popular, mostly Hollywood films. This is clearly the case and is an ambiguous issue within Serbian film of the 1990s, that was a matter of debate by film scholars and critics. This problem will be explored further in this thesis, by considering different theories of film scholars on Serbian cinema, and exploration of the films *per se*.

As Commoli and Narboni argue, “once we realize that it is the nature of the system to turn the cinema into an instrument of ideology, we can see that the filmmaker's first task is to show up the cinema's so-called 'depiction of reality'.”<sup>40</sup> As they further argue the problem of depiction of reality is solved in the so-called art cinema which “seeks to solve the problem in a sophisticated way: by the device of *ambiguity*.”<sup>41</sup> They provide several categories in which they discuss different ways that films can function within ideological contexts.<sup>42</sup> Commoli and Narboni conclude that it is “the job of film criticism”<sup>43</sup> to identify where specific films differ in their relation to ideological context within which they were made. Martin and Ostwalt distinguish three types of criticism in exploration of religion and film: theological, mythological and ideological criticism, proposing a fourth type which would combine all three approaches.<sup>44</sup> One of the attempts of this study is to provide ideological and mythological criticism in exploration of ideological representation in the films. To do so I use a cultural studies approach which enables me to apply a wide range of different methods in analysis, from the analysis of the socio-political context to analysis of the films themselves, for the purpose of better understanding of the

39 Commoli, Jean-Luc and Narboni, Jean: “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” in Braudy, Leo and Cohen, Marshall: *Film Theory and Criticism*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 754.

40 Commoli, Jean-Luc and Narboni, Jean: *Ibid*, p. 755.

41 Commoli, Jean-Luc and Narboni, Jean: *Ibid*, p. 721.

42 For the whole discussion see Commoli, Jean-Luc and Narboni, Jean: *Ibid*, p. 755-759.

43 Commoli, Jean-Luc and Narboni, Jean: *Ibid*, p. 754.

44 See Nolan, Steve: “Towards a New Religious Film Criticism: Using Film to Understand Religious Identity Rather than Locate Cinematic Analogue” in Mitchell, Jolyon and Marriage, Sophia eds.: *Mediating Religion*, London, New York: T& T Clark, 2003, p. 175-176.

See also: Martin, Joel and Ostwalt, Conrad Eugene, eds.: *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film*, Boulder, Colorado; Oxford: Westview Press, 1995, p.7.

material studied and the topic. In this regard, I do not seek to offer simplified answers in consideration of the ideological framework of Serbian films, but rather to emphasize the importance of various elements in understanding the films, especially when it comes to categorizing films as politically correct or incorrect, which film critics tended to do in the case of the Serbian films, as will be discussed in this thesis. In the next section I turn to a discussion of contextual analysis as an equally important approach that I employ in my analysis.

## **1.2. The Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis has seven chapters altogether. In this chapter I have stated my research questions and outlined my methodology. In chapter 2, I discuss the research context and I consider a range of different literature relevant to my research. I divide this chapter into three parts. The first part is devoted to the field of film and religion in which I position this study. I discuss works which are the most pertinent to my thesis and I explain how this study contributes to the field. In the second part I discuss the literature that I used for the exploration of the socio-political context of the 1990s, which includes studies and works from diverse fields. The third part is devoted to literature written on Balkan, Yugoslav and Serbian cinema. I focus in particular on different studies and analysis written on Serbian film of the 1990s, which is important for the further discussion of Serbian film and for my analysis of the critical reception of the films.

Chapter 3 of this thesis is devoted to analysis of the socio-political context of the 1990s and the creation of Milosevic's political ideology, which involves the period of the 1980s and 1990s. I focus on the formation and characteristics of nationalist-religious ideology in spheres of “secular and sacred”, in the state and the Church, and the political and social impacts of their interaction. In the first part of this chapter I briefly consider some of the historical roots of nationalist-religious ideology and then shift to concrete events and the rise of Serbian nationalism in the late 1980s. I explain how the process of homogenization started after Milosevic gained power in

the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Serbia, how it was supported by institutions such as the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and I describe the main characteristics of this new public political discourse. I then consider the role of the Church in the political events that took place at the same period of time and in the process of recreating Serbian national identity. I discuss the attitude of the Church towards the Serbian national question and how it supported the development of nationalism and religious ideology. I suggest that the *Kosovo Myth* played an important role in this process. I consider the nationalist and religious aspects of this myth. My aim is not just to point to its exploitation for political purposes but rather to consider what a nationalist-religious ideology actually means in the Serbian context. The political ideology around which the Church and the state were united was crucial in mobilizing the masses in the late 1980s and for the purposes of political support to Milosevic. Within this chapter I also consider the role of the media in spreading the new ideological discourse. “Hate speech” combined with the new cultural forms, which represented the new aesthetic of the 1990s, were forerunners to the war. The discussion on mediascape includes the populist representation of Orthodoxy. The aim of this third chapter is to describe the socio-political context of the Milosevic regime and explain the nationalist-religious ideology as the essence of the new political ideology that will be explored in relation to the films.

Chapters 4 to 6 are devoted to a critical exploration of 1990s films and they represent the core of this study. In chapter 4 I investigate the cinematic context of the 1990s. I discuss how the films produced over this period of time represent both the war and the impacts of the political ideology of the Milosevic regime. In the first part of this chapter I briefly discuss Yugoslav cinematography and one of the most important cinematographic movements: the *Black Wave*. There are several reasons why I open this chapter with a discussion of the Yugoslav cinematography and the *Black Wave* movement. First, it is important to contextualize Serbian cinema within a specific cultural and historical frame. Second, my aim is to point to the tradition of politically engaged films which started with the *Black Wave*. Third, it is important to

contextualize the subsequent discussion of politically subversive films within a specific cultural tradition.

The next part of chapter 4 represents a critical examination of films produced in the 1990s. Among a number of films that I briefly mention, I select those films that dealt with the socio-political issues of the 1990s. My aim is to demonstrate that Serbian cinema of the 1990s was socially and politically engaged cinema and that the film directors were strongly engaged with issues of that time, such as the break-up of Yugoslavia and the escalation of the conflict. I discuss a diversity of perspectives that the films provided on the theme of the civil war and Milosevic's Serbia. The political character of these films is evident in the fact that they were critically depicting the ongoing issues in Serbian society. On the other hand some of these films were perceived by critics as not critical enough. I investigate in detail how the films depicted the civil war, the political regime and Serbian society of the 1990s. In order to enrich this discussion I discuss two particular films which dealt in greater detail with the problems of ideology and violence that resulted: *Keg of Gunpowder* (*Bure Baruta*, Goran Paskaljevic, 1998) and *Premeditated Murder* (*Ubistvo s Predumisljajem*, Gorcin Stojanovic, 1996). In the case of the first film I investigate how the film portrayed how the problem of violence was connected to state violence and to the political regime of the 1990s. The second film, *Premeditated Murder*, I explore because of its significant portrayal of the totalitarian ideologies and their impacts on society and on the so-called ordinary people. Both films interrogate the assumption that Serbian film of the 1990s tended to show the civil war as a part of mythological circle and a part of the "Balkans' destiny." With this discussion I conclude chapter 4. The analysis of the last film represents a form of introduction to the next chapters in which I deal in more detail with the cinematic representation of nationalist-religious ideology. At the end of chapter 4 I explain why I chose two specific films for further analysis and discussion. At the heart of my fourth chapter is the analysis of the range of films produced in the 1990s. The discussion of the cinematic context of the 1990s leads on to a detailed analysis of the two specific films.



In chapter 5, I analyse the film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (*Lepa sela, lepo gore*, Srdjan Dragojevic). In the first part of this chapter I discuss film genre and I give background information about the film production and the plot. In the next section I discuss the critical reception of the film, how it was perceived by different critics and scholars and the main issues that the critics addressed concerning this film. The second part of this chapter is devoted to the film analysis. I first focus on an analysis of the main characters. The analysis of the characters is divided into four sections. In each of these sections I discuss the main issues which are depicted through the main characters who are representatives of specific social groups. I also analyse the depiction of nationalist-religious ideology in the film. Due to the complex representation of the ideology and its impacts in the film I divide my analysis into several parts. In the first part I discuss the national and religious identity of the main characters, in the second part I analyse the religious images in the film, their connection to national symbols and their place and meaning within the film setting and the context of the story. Next I consider the cinematic portrayal of the emergence of pseudo-historical discourse into the public sphere and its importance in creating a nationalist-religious ideology. In the next part I analyse the cinematic representation of media propaganda and its role in spreading the new political discourse. In the last part of my analysis of nationalist-religious ideology I investigate the cinematic representation of 'others', how *our perception of others* (my italics) was shaped and influenced by this dominant ideology. The overall aim in this chapter is to analyse in detail the diverse narrative and visual structures that portray the nationalist-religious ideology, its formation, main characteristics and impacts.

In chapter 6 I analyse the film *Wounds* (*Rane*, Srdjan Dragojevic). This chapter is structured similarly to the previous one. In the first part I discuss film genre, production, plot and critical reception of the film. The analysis of the critical reception of this film, as in the previous case, has importance for the further discussion on the cinematic representation of ideology, and its possible subversiveness. In the next part of this chapter I analyse the characters in the film. The aim is to contextualize these characters in the socio-political and cultural milieu

of the 1990s. My analysis is divided into three categories: in the first I consider the portrayal of the generational and ideological clash, in the second I consider the portrayal of the women in the cultural context of the 1990s, while in the third I look at the depiction of criminals and war profiteers. The characters in these categories represent specific social and cultural groups that emerged during the 1990s and they should be understood within this wider context.

The following section is devoted to the analysis of the depiction of the political ideology of the Milosevic regime and is divided into four different sections. I first discuss how the film portrays the emergence of nationalism into the public sphere in the early 1990s. I then focus on the function of religious images and national symbols in the wider context of the film. Following on from this I consider the depiction of media propaganda, since in this film the director devotes much more space to the role of regime's media. I analyse these diverse perspectives that film provides on Milosevic's media. I finally discuss the cinematic representation of the new culture of the 1990s, the interconnection between economic collapse, turbo-folk culture, and crime as direct consequences of the new political ideology. My aim is to contribute to an understanding of how this film critically explored the role of ideology in creating the new socio-cultural political environment of the 1990s.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter of this thesis. In the first part of my conclusion I discuss the films analysed and how they portray nationalist-religious ideology. I summarize the main points that emerge from my analysis. Next I consider to what extent these portrayals can be considered subversive. I suggest how this study contributes to the wider discussion on Serbian cinema and I propose new approaches in reading Serbian film. The ambiguous character of the films requires shifting the focus to aspects of the films which were frequently neglected in existing readings. At the end of my last chapter I propose future research that could be developed from this thesis.

### **1.3. Conclusion**

This introductory chapter of my thesis has outlined my research motives, the aims and objectives of this study, and my methodological approaches to the research material. In the first part of this chapter I explained why Serbia is the focus of this study, why I decided to explore Serbian films of the 1990s and my personal reasons which inspired me as a researcher to undertake this study. I also explained how this study connects to the contemporary socio-political context in Serbia, and how the topic which I investigate has not lost its relevance. Next, I outlined my research questions and the focus of my research. I stated the initial and main question with which I began this research, which was how Serbian films can inform us about the ideological discourse of the 1990s. I further identified two main questions that arise from this initial one, which are: how did the films portray nationalist-religious ideology and can these cinematic portrayals be considered subversive?

I then moved on to outline my research methodology and explained how I analyse Serbian films in order to answer my research questions. I discussed in detail the different approaches that I use in this thesis. Since this is an interdisciplinary study I offer an overall picture of the different methodological approaches I use some of which are “borrowed” from different disciplines, such as those from film theory for example, in order to enrich my research. These different approaches were crucial for my research in finding answers to the key questions of this thesis.

The last section of this opening chapter was devoted to the structure of my thesis. I explain in detail how I structured each chapter. My aim was to explain how each of these chapters can inform us not only about the specific subject discussed but also how they are connected and lead towards my conclusion. The next chapter of this thesis is devoted to the research context, which is important for the positioning of this study and for understanding the different contexts which were pertinent to my research and to further analysis of the films.

## Chapter 2

### The Research Context

#### 2.0. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the different research contexts relevant to this study. Stewart Hoover in his *Religion in the Media Age* observes media as a “common culture.”<sup>1</sup> Since “religious values and beliefs are diffused throughout popular culture”<sup>2</sup> it is important to consider carefully the interdisciplinary resources available for making sense of this diffusion. As I stated in the previous chapter the aim of this thesis is to investigate how 1990s Serbian films depicted religious beliefs and what this depiction says both about films and religion in Serbian 1990s context. The investigation of this issue required broad research that included works of scholars from different areas and academic disciplines, from the fields of film and religion and film studies, to political studies, sociology and anthropology.

Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of this study I divide this chapter into three parts. The first part is devoted to the field of film and religion, in which this thesis is positioned. I review the field framing the most significant discussions for my research. In the second part of this chapter I survey the literature which is directly relevant to chapter 3, and which aims to contextualize this thesis within the ideological context of the 1990s. In chapter 3 my focus is upon the nationalist-religious ideology and therefore the literature I survey is selected according to this focus. The third part of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of Serbian cinema as a part of former Yugoslav and Balkan cinema. This part is divided into two sections: the first section surveys the literature written on Yugoslav cinema and its most

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<sup>1</sup> Hoover, Stewart: *Religion in the Media Age*, London: Routledge, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Hoover, Stewart: *Ibid*, p.121.

significant cinematic traditions while in the second part I discuss the studies and works on Serbian cinema of the 1990s.

My aim in this chapter is to explain first how this thesis contributes to the field of film and religion, and second how it bridges the gap in existing studies on Serbian cinematography. It is important to note that the role of the Church in the formation of nationalist-religious ideology has not been studied enough. In this sense I hope that my thesis can contribute also to those scholars of diverse disciplines who have an interest in the issues of religion, nation and identity in the Balkans and post-Yugoslav context.

## **2.1. Film and Religion**

### **2.1.1. Introduction**

This study is located within the field of film and religion. To make a fully comprehensive review of the field is beyond the scope of this work. In this discussion which includes a brief survey of the field, I consider the scholars whose work informed me on different aspects and approaches in the field of film and religion. Before I turn to discuss these approaches in this emerging field I briefly discuss the early beginnings of the cinema and the historical background of the field. The discussion on different approaches in film and religion I divide into three sections. These three sections are constructed according to some of the main approaches that scholars of religion and film have applied in their work: biblical, theological and cultural studies approaches. It is important to emphasize that all these categories are negotiable, for example the theological approach might use some of the methods of cultural studies, which does not exclude theological reflections in reading films. The theological approach includes both how theologians read certain film texts and how the audience makes theological meanings from symbols, images and narrative in so-called secular or less explicit religious films. It is useful to remember that many of the scholars who are discussed here, regardless of their particular approaches, proposed a dialogical model when it comes to film and

religion.<sup>3</sup> Therefore it is important to note that these categories are not definite and that many of these approaches may overlap and argue for similar methods in the exploration of religion and film. Among the many works that I consider here are also those who informed me on what my work *is not* (my italics) within this dialogue, which was important in helping me to place my study within the field. For the purpose of this thesis however I also discuss the most pertinent works for my research and the ones which thus contributed to this study.

### 2.1.2. Early Beginnings of Cinema and the Development of the Field of Film and Religion

Before I turn to consider the specific works in the field it is useful to underline the fact that the interaction between religion and film has existed since the early expansion of the cinema. Cinema has remained of interest to theologians from its early beginnings until the present. The religious representatives in the early age of cinema tended to reject motion pictures as they were concerned with negative impacts that film might have on the audience and believers, which resulted in censorship.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the decades different parties in diverse countries were considering the so-called negative, immoral, influence of cinema, such as was the case with Iran and Turkey.<sup>5</sup> Cinema was also considered as a powerful political weapon from the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany exemplified by the release of the *Triumph of the Will*.<sup>6</sup>

Cinema, which has a power to mediate the transcendental and to engage with the most delicate issues of human existence, remained in the focus of theologians and religious scholars. Many scholars have focused upon different theological reflections

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<sup>3</sup> Deacy and Ortiz proposed a dialogical model in film and religion studies but a similar initiative can also be found in works of scholars such as Clive Marsh or Robert Johnston.

<sup>4</sup> See Aldgate, Anthony: *Censorship in Theatre and Cinema*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Theology and Film: Challenging the Sacred/Secular Divide*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> *Triumph of the Will* (1935) is a Nazi propagandist film made by Leni Riefenstahl. DVD *Triumph of the Will*, Synapse: 2001.

on cinema in order to identify how the relationship of religion and film developed throughout history and which directions it takes in the present. A survey of the history of the relationship between the church and Hollywood is given in Johnston's *Reel Spirituality*.<sup>7</sup>

Robert Johnston described theological responses to film as historically moving from: avoidance, caution, dialogue, and appropriation to divine encounter.<sup>8</sup> Similarly to Johnston, Lloyd Baugh identifies diverse trends in reading the so-called Jesus films within their historical framework. The field emerges in the 1970s with the works of scholars, such as Neil Hurley or Ron Holloway, who started theological discussion on film. Ronald Holloway argued that cinema experienced its momentum of communion with existentialism, meaning that its power lies in sketching life as it is and thus raising fundamental questions.<sup>9</sup> Exploration of social and historical conditions as well as human nature, in Holloway's view, demonstrates the openness of cinema for contemplation on existing problems. Holloway argued that this openness of cinema for problems represents openness for the transcendent.<sup>10</sup> The discipline of film and religion within academia developed in the 1990s with the emergence of a number of academic studies and scholars who dealt in various ways with film and theology or religious studies.

### 2.1.3. Film and Religion in Dialogue

A survey of a rich body of film and religion studies and theoretical discussions is given by Terry Lindvall in his *Religion and Film*.<sup>11</sup> Lindvall's work surveys the field from its early beginnings to the most recent discussions, and as such was important for my research as it extended my knowledge and directed me to more specific

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7 Johnston, Robert: *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000

8 Johnston, Robert: *Ibid*, p. 41.

9 Holloway, Ronald: *Beyond the Image*, Geneva: Film Oikoumene, World Council of Churches, 1977, p. 21.

10 Holloway, Ronald: *Ibid*, p. 24.

11 Lindvall, Terry: *Religion and Film, Part II: Theology and Pedagogy*, Communication Research Trends, Centre for Study of Communication and Culture, Volume 24 (2005) No.1.

explorations in the field, which are relevant to this study. Many scholars encountered cinema as a theological resource while there was a significant number who advocated a cultural studies approach in religion and film field. While films with explicit religious themes as those that depict religion and religious questions can be approached from a theological perspective, secular films represented a challenge for theologians.

With a growing tendency of theologians and religion scholars to consider so-called secular films, there emerges and develops a dialogue between religion and theology and film.<sup>12</sup> Some of the questions raised by religious scholars are whether film can actually perform religion and if so in what ways, and whether film is becoming “a substitute for religion.”<sup>13</sup> In this sense we can identify the shift in the focus from how film can represent religion and biblical texts to observation of film as a form of religion, a so-called sacred space in which viewers are gathered around common experience in search of spirituality or spiritual answers.

Mitchell and Plate provided a variety of articles on the relationship between film and theology and religious studies in *The Religion and Film Reader*.<sup>14</sup> The historical shift of the subjects and genre being studied informs about the growing developments of the field; explorations move from religion and film to film *as* religion. They identified three models as the most common in the film and religion dialogue, the first one can be described as “religion in film”<sup>15</sup> in which scholars explored “the ways religious symbols, themes, or figures are portrayed through the narrative, sounds, images...”<sup>16</sup> then “film *as* religion in which film and religion serve an

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12 Almost all scholars that are discussed in this section considered films which did not have explicit religious themes. Their focus shifts from Jesus films to Hollywood popular films. Among scholars are Christopher Deacy, Gaye Ortiz, Margaret Miles, Clive Marsh, Erin Runions, Melanie Wright, John Lyden.

13 See Lyden, John: *Film as Religion*, New York: University Press, 2003; Also see Marsh, Clive: *Cinema and Sentiment, Film's Challenge to Theology*, Milton Keynes UK & Waynesboro, USA: Paternoster, 2004.

14 Mitchell, Jolyon and Plate, S. Brent: *The Religion and Film Reader*, New York, London: Routledge, 2007.

15 Mitchell, Jolyon and Plate, S. Brent: *Ibid*, p. 3.

16 Mitchell, Jolyon and Plate, S. Brent: *Ibid*, p. 3.



analogous function...particularly in the cinematic viewing experience”<sup>17</sup>, and finally there is a “broad view of religion *and* film.”<sup>18</sup> My research would fit into the first category, since I am analysing religion in film.

In addition Mitchell and Plate's work outlined the history of the field and also identified key resources for my research. The range of work given in this study, from scholars of film studies and religion to filmmakers, provided a multicultural perspective on the film and religion field. Mitchell and Plate's work summarized recent discussions in the religion and film field, with theological and biblical approaches as a separate topic. The study not only involves European and North American perspectives but also provides a global vision of Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Australia. Mitchell questions when it comes to global perspectives what we can identify as religious in film, in the case of some cultures (or filmmakers) which do not have the category of “religious” as Western civilization does or how we deal with directors who have no interest in religion but deal with “ultimate significance.”<sup>19</sup>

The use of films as a theological resource is not central for my study and my research focuses more upon how film can inform us about religion and the ideological context of society. I do consider however, how cinematic representation of religion and religious images, can be a tool of subversion. While my research is more informed by the work of scholars working with a cultural studies approach I do also draw on the work of scholars who adopted different approaches. It is important to note that current film and religious dialogue has developed towards considering different genres and audience research. The field however still lacks studies on national cinemas, which is the gap I intend to fill with this study. In the next sections I will discuss three main approaches in the field. The most space is devoted to the cultural studies approach since this is the approach that I undertake in this thesis.

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17 Mitchell, Jolyon and Plate, S. Brent: *Ibid*, p. 3.

18 Mitchell, Jolyon and Plate, S. Brent: *Ibid*, p. 3.

19 Mitchell, Jolyon and Plate, S. Brent: *Ibid*, p. 3.

#### 2.1.4. Biblical Approach

The relation between the Bible and film has long been a matter of interest in the field. These studies include films which explicitly dealt with cinematic representations of Jesus but also films which reflect other biblical texts and parables. In this part I discuss two scholars, Erin Runions and Lloyd Baugh, who use a biblical approach in reading the film to investigate the correlation between Bible text and films and in order to define the subversive potential of such cinematic representations. Their works informed me on different aspects of filmic depiction of religious images and biblical texts which once transmitted to the big screen can communicate controversial meanings.

Baugh's study *Imaging the Divine*<sup>20</sup>, could be considered as a combination of both a historical and biblical approach, for two reasons: first, because he provides a historical review of two approaches to Jesus films, and second because he discusses subversive representations of biblical text in the film. For example, Baugh considers Pasolini's *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* as the film which brought a "revolutionary aspect of Jesus", and consequently was condemned by the extreme right wing in Italy resulting in fascist demonstrations during the Venice Film Festival.<sup>21</sup> Baugh points to the subversive representation of Jesus who differently from Zeffirelli's one, speaks on social justice, expressing anger and demand for transformation. In Baugh's opinion this masterpiece of Pasolini was "motivated by the hope that it might serve to bring about a reconciliatory dialogue between Marxism and Christianity."<sup>22</sup> Resistance and subversiveness therefore are categories that can be found in so-called Jesus films, which is clearly the case with Pasolini's film, and biblical text as such becomes a source of cinematic subversiveness.

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20 Baugh, Lloyd: *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-figures in Film*, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997.

21 Baugh, Lloyd: *Ibid*, p. 96.

22 Baugh, Lloyd: *Ibid*, p. 99.

The correlation between the biblical text and film can construct theological themes in the films but also subversion especially if films deal with issues which require ideological positioning. Erin Runions in *How Hysterical*<sup>23</sup> uses a biblical frame in approaching the film text for her exploration on resistance in the Bible and cinema. Runions investigates biblical texts and film, and the “questions of identification with and resistance to hegemonic and oppressive societal norms and ideals.”<sup>24</sup> In her discussion Runions further investigates the ideological framework that surrounds films such as *Three Kings*, in which a biblical frame plays a crucial role in the final determination of the ideological context of the film. Biblical allusions and parallels to the text of the Bible, Runion sees not as subversive but as a subtle affirmation of the U.S. political discourse. Runions' definition of resistance as “alternate identifications” was important for my exploration of Serbian films. In this sense I consider the possible subversive representation of religious images and text as a quest for an alternative. This problem will be explored further in this study and discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

Both Runions' and Baugh's studies, although coming from a different approach, were important for my thesis. Their work drew my attention to the importance of biblical text in film. The allusions to the original biblical texts expressed through an image, for example, deserve attention since they can be a source for understanding the subversiveness of the film narrative. In the analysis of the film *Wounds* I investigate religious images among which some make allusions to Biblical text and meaning, such as the image of the *Last Supper* which symbolically represents liturgical unity in Christ.<sup>25</sup> As I will argue in Chapter 6 the biblical text transmitted through this image, is used as a mode of subversion of the oppressive socio-political regime.

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23 Runions, Erin: *How Hysterical: Identification and Resistance in the Bible and Film*, New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

24 Runions, Erin: *Ibid*, p.1.

25 For further explanation of Orthodox Liturgy see Schmemmann, Alexander: *For the Life of the World*, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004.

### 2.1.5. Theological Approach

In this section I consider a theological approach to cinema. Although in my study I do not take this approach I review some of the most important studies in the field in order to contextualize this thesis within the recent discussions in the field. Different from a biblical approach, which mainly focuses upon biblical and film text, a theological approach brings into discussion a variety of elements such as for example the film's aesthetics, the importance of an image, and the audience's response to such representations. Clive Marsh,<sup>26</sup> Christopher Deacy,<sup>27</sup> and Robert Johnston,<sup>28</sup> are some of the scholars who emphasized different aspects in theological approach to the cinema.

Discussing film as a narrative, for example, Johnston emphasizes the importance of an image. In reading film as an image he explains how theology relates to images built upon Paul Tillich's typology. The common element for all types of images is their ability to become mediators of ultimate reality.<sup>29</sup> Johnston also emphasizes the significance of image, that has been often overlooked in favour of film text by protestant scholars.<sup>30</sup> This was an important point for my study since in this thesis I give a considerable importance to analysis of the images. Johnston also emphasized the importance of theology outside the church considering cinema as valuable site of this, and he lists six further reasons why cinema should be studied by theologians.<sup>31</sup> He further proposes a "well-rounded approach to the cinema"<sup>32</sup> and discusses auteur,

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26 Marsh, Clive: *Cinema and Sentiment, Film's Challenge to Theology*, Milton Keynes UK & Waynesboro, USA: Paternoster, 2004

27 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*.

28 Johnston, Robert: *Ibid*.

29 Johnston, Robert: *Ibid*, p. 78.

30 See Johnston, Robert: *Ibid*, p. 76-77.

31 The reasons are: God's grace is present throughout human culture, (2) Theology should be concerned with the Spirit's presence and work in the world, (3) God is active within the wider culture and speaks to us through all of life, (4) Image as well as word can help us to encounter God, (5) Theology's narrative shape makes it particularly open to interaction with other stories, (6) the nature of constructive theology is a dialogue between God's story (...) and our stories (...) See Johnston, Robert: *Ibid*, p. 64.

32 Johnston, Robert: *Ibid*, p.115.

genre, thematic and cultural criticism suggesting further a necessity for theological criticism.<sup>33</sup> Johnston's approach lacks a consideration of the problems of ideology, subversion and resistance in theological criticism. He takes theology as an equal dialogical partner in film studies, and fails to recognize the problems of cinematic subversion of theology, theological images and themes and thus he fails to provide theological answers to such problems. Subversion of theology in the cinematic context, its ideological assumptions remain issues that Johnston does not consider sufficiently in his study.

Clive Marsh proposed a modification of Tillich's model of correlation which expresses more space for theological requirements than it really leaves space for popular culture.<sup>34</sup> Marsh further focuses on what the audience does with the film, examining the interaction between the film and the viewers.<sup>35</sup> How the audience make meaning of the film and whether this has any theological significance seems to be one of the ongoing questions that scholars frequently ask. From the position of religious studies and theology, film was often perceived as a possible site for *religious experience* (my italics). This comes from assumptions such as, for example, that every film is religious because it is "about life and its meaning"<sup>36</sup>, that films "have theological significance as they are developing values and a belief system"<sup>37</sup> or that "narrative structure itself is religious and provides transcendent meanings."<sup>38</sup> In this sense Marsh argued that the religious experience that a film can provide is to be found in "key concepts such as salvation, revelation or redemption, even if it is secularised redemption"<sup>39</sup> and in such cases the audience that has interest in religion and the transcendental can engage dialogically with film.<sup>40</sup> Again, as in the previous

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33 Johnston, Robert: *Ibid*, p.151-172.

34 See Marsh, Clive: "Film and Theologies of Culture" in Marsh, Clive and Ortiz, Gaye, eds.: *Explorations in Theology and Film*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

35 Marsh, Clive: *Ibid*, p. 36.

36 Wright, Melanie: *Religion and Film: An Introduction*, London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007, p. 16.

37 Clive Marsh quoted in Lindvall, Terry: *Religion and Film, Part II: Theology and Pedagogy*, Communication Research Trends, Centre for Study of Communication and Culture, Volume 24 (2005) No.1, p. 5.

38 Lindvall, Terry: *Ibid*, p. 7.

39 Marsh, Clive: *Ibid*, p. 48.

40 Clive Marsh explores theological points in interaction with film through the analysis of *The*

case, theology is taken as a key in reading the issues of the transcendent and existential, but its critical potential when it comes to cinematic criticism of religion and theology as such, is not considered nor explored. In both cases, it seems that theology remains an isolated phenomenon which serves to help the audience to make meaning out of the film text, which is only partially true. What is lacking is considering subversion and resistance as theological categories that can enrich the theological approach to the cinema.

Other scholars also proposed a dialogical model in the studies of film and religion. Eichenberger for example argued that both film and theology can learn a lot from each other and the research in this field has to be dialogically developed. He expressed the need for a theology of image.<sup>41</sup> One of the central questions is how film as an aesthetic form of expression could be considered as an icon. Icon, in this sense, does not have any liturgical connotation but refers more to the aesthetic representation of “the inexpressible.” Image *per se* can be powerful as much as narrative can. I argue that when we speak about theology and film we need to pay more attention to images, as theology can equally participate not just in an examination of film narrative but also in an exploration of film language. My particular interest is in the use of sacred images, such as icons, in film and for the purpose of subversion. In other words, how can an initially sacred image in the film language represent something else, or be used for criticism of deviations of religion?

A dialogical model when approaching film was further proposed by Deacy and Ortiz, who suggested that theology was never “conducted in a vacuum”<sup>42</sup> and therefore the tendency to observe Christianity and culture as two separate and “monolithic entities”<sup>43</sup> is not appropriate. In the Christ and culture correlation Deacy suggests the reconsideration of Niebuhr's model to set a discussion between sacred and secular, to

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*Shawshank Redemption*. Marsh, Clive: *Ibid*, p. 38-58.

41 Eichenberger, Ambros: “Approaches to Film Criticism”, in May, John: *New Image of Religious Film*, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997, p. 6-7.

42 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 77.

43 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 66.

some extent artificially divided realms.<sup>44</sup> Deacy further suggests the model of “two way conversation”<sup>45</sup>, in which theologians should apply “appropriate critical tools”<sup>46</sup> when engaging with popular culture. Considering the significance of the works of scholars such as Aichele and Walsh in *Screening Scripture* and Clive Marsh for advancing the dialogical model<sup>47</sup>, this book aims to provide a detailed overview of the manner and extent in which theology and film provides us with understanding on issues such as “the role of the women, the environment, violence, justice, war, and eschatology.”<sup>48</sup> In this sense Ortiz and Deacy aim to bridge the gap between “the secular” and “sacred” in the field of religion and film. Ortiz and Deacy nevertheless fail to address how religion in film reflects the ideological and political issues of its context.

#### 2.1.6. Cultural Studies Approach

In this section I discuss the cultural studies approach to film. A cultural studies approach takes into consideration not only film narrative and film language but also the context in which specific cinematographies function. In this sense, film is a form of cultural text that informs us about society but also at the same time represents a *product* (my italics) that has economic, political and social value. Scholars such as Margaret Miles, John Lyden, and Melanie Wright propose the cultural studies approach in studying religion and film. Since I identify my approach as closest to cultural studies, here I will address some of the main points that these scholars make.

A pioneer in the field who first advocated the cultural studies approach is Margaret Miles. In her study she focused on film as a product rather than film as the text, which is one of the reasons why she suggested a cultural studies approach to the

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44 See Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 8-65.

45 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 76.

46 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 74.

47 See Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 4.

48 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 75.

cinema.<sup>49</sup> For Miles it is important to observe film as a product of various but at the same time specific socio-political and cultural conditions. In this sense “she studies the particular historical moment from which the film originates.”<sup>50</sup> This approach proved useful for the purpose of this thesis, which is in a way a study not only of film, its narrative and image, but also of a particular historical and socio-political moment, that as I argue, we can also learn about through film. My work extends Miles' position by putting into practice investigation of the film as a product of its time and specific conditions, or in other words, my analysis of the film is inseparable from the analysis of the socio-political context. I hope to demonstrate that the reading and understanding of particular films is impossible without acknowledging the social and historical frame as equally important for the discussion. What supports this argument is, as we will see further in this thesis, the reception that the films had among film scholars and critics whose diverse reading and criticism of the films was mainly determined by the film context: it came as a result of their reading of the text within a specific historical and political frame of Serbia of the 1990s. Miles was criticized on the grounds that her approach could have come from “any humanist discipline”<sup>51</sup> and that “there is nothing particularly 'religious' about it”<sup>52</sup> because of her readiness to adopt any social issue as related to religion. In this sense, my study will demonstrate why and how the historical and socio-political moment of the 1990s Serbia is directly related to religion.

Developing Miles' approach John Lyden encountered the significance of research into the audience. Lyden suggested that film can function religiously, offering “ritualized experience”<sup>53</sup>, which is an important aspect that should not be overlooked. Its function is therefore determined by the audience.<sup>54</sup> In a similar fashion both Deacy and Marsh, as discussed before, considered the question of the audience as

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49 Miles, Margaret: *Seeing is Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

50 Miles, Margaret: *Ibid*, p. 23.

51 Watkins, Greg: *Seeing and Being Seen: Distinctively Filmic and Religious Elements in Film*, *Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol.3, No.2, October 1999, <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/watkins.htm>

52 Watkins, Greg: *Ibid*, <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/watkins.htm>

53 Lyden, John: *Ibid*, p. 4.

54 Lyden, John: *Ibid*, p. 44 - 48.



vital for further research in the field. Although audience reception research is not within the scope of this study I consider the audience through the discussion on film reception by different scholars and film critics both from the Balkans and abroad.

Furthermore Lyden argues that film, besides being a tool for the transcendent, can also be an ideological tool and as such films can support or subvert established power structures, questioning the society's values.<sup>55</sup> This aspect of Lyden's approach was valuable for my research in which I consider Serbian film as an ideological site, or in other words as a source for information on ideology in which religion with its institutional, mythological and ritualizing aspects played a significant role. In this sense I am looking at film as a communicator of ideology, how film represents it and how it eventually subverts it through the representation of religion.

Christopher Deacy and Gaye Ortiz's *Theology and Film*, has already been mentioned in the previous section which deals with theological approaches to film, but as I noted some of the scholars may be considered in more than one category. Ortiz and Deacy's book reconsiders to some extent the artificial division between "the secular" and "the sacred", proposing that every film can be qualified as religious.<sup>56</sup> By addressing different cinematic topics, Deacy and Ortiz demonstrate how theology provides a unique perspective on the ongoing cinematic issues, showing that the sacred and secular division is not tenable. These arguments certainly place them among primarily theologically orientated scholars when it comes to the correlation with film studies. Deacy and Ortiz, however propose reconsideration of the methods and approaches in this interdisciplinary field and thus they challenge the existing boundaries in the theology and film framework, for which reason I include them also in this section. Their recognition of the necessity of applying different methodologies and approaches and arguing for a dialogical model, brings them closer to the cultural studies approach. Further, Ortiz' discussion on film genre and her proposal in defining for example war-genre films, was extremely pertinent to my work. Ortiz argues that when we are defining war-genre we should first identify specific themes,

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<sup>55</sup> Lindvall, Terry: *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 84.

such as for example the “ethics of killing” or “patriotism.”<sup>57</sup> This was of importance for my analysis of the films, especially *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, which is classified as a war film but actually was perceived by some critics, as we will see, as a pro-war film. In this sense, I follow, to some extent, Ortiz's proposed model of deconstructing the genre according to the prevailing themes in the film. Patriotism, nationalism and the ethics of killing are the themes to be found in this film which I primarily classified as black comedy anti-war genre. The definition of the genre is important for this discussion on the representation of ideology in Serbian films and their potential subversiveness. This is also important because film critics often perceived those films as controversial. The view of critics on Serbian films opens the question of war-genre films and how we make a distinction between anti-war and war propagandist film. Ortiz shows that genre is not only a negotiable term but that discussing sub-genre contributes to classifying films more precisely. She also considers the importance of “religious and cultural attitudes” shifting the focus to what audiences actually do with the ideological presumptions of the film, arguing that “questioning the war” within cinema can be “one of the ways to promote peace.”<sup>58</sup> The categorization of Serbian films such as *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* as belonging to the war film genre, as we will see further in this thesis, does not seem to be sufficient since the inevitable question is: what kind of war film do we speak about? Further it is important to consider which films we consider as pro-war or anti-war films and why. My analysis further indicates that to answer this question is not always easy, especially if we bear in mind that, no matter how critical they tend to be, most of the time films operate within the context in which they were made.

Therefore an important question is whether the film can escape the ideological discourse of its time. Even when we speak about *Black Wave* films, which were considered by foreign critics often as anti-communist films or as films of resistance to the communist regime and totalitarian ideology, we might well ask the same question. Bearing in mind that the *Black Wave* films were an actual result of their context and time, we may also consider their criticism as one that could come from a

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57 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 162.

58 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 177.

Marxist stand point. In this case their criticism of totalitarianism can refer not only to communism but also to some forms of capitalism. These are all issues that need to be considered when we put films into certain categories which involve political connotation.

Among scholars who advocated the cultural studies approach, Melanie Wright's work was in many respects the most relevant to my research. In her *Religion and Film* she develops Miles' approach "in several respects"<sup>59</sup> suggesting a multi-dimensional approach in the field of film and religion.<sup>60</sup> This approach does not mean rejection of "previously held assumptions"<sup>61</sup> but enriching the field by taking into account cultural studies as "integrative of a range of strategies used by specialist film critics"<sup>62</sup> which at the same time demonstrates an openness that "allows conversation with the particular specialist knowledge and methodologies that practitioners of religious study (and theology) can bring to film."<sup>63</sup> Wright further argues about the importance of studying film language within the field of religion and film, questioning whether in that sense "the film has been studied at all."<sup>64</sup> She argues that usually scholars of religious studies and theology express a tendency to approach film just as a narrative and to neglect the visual side of the film that coexists from image and cut. In this sense the multi-dimensional approach she is proposing aims to provide a methodological framework which would "offer a richer account of the films concerned" looking at how film texts operate within and also construct particular contexts.<sup>65</sup> In this way, Wright argues, it is possible "to gain a sense of what 'film' is, both as a series of images...and as a social artefact."<sup>66</sup> She also stresses the importance of film selection which must be "relevant to the problems in hand"<sup>67</sup> and as such fit the aim of the project.<sup>68</sup>

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59 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 29.

60 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 30.

61 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 30.

62 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 30.

63 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 30.

64 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 22.

65 Paraphrased, Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 30.

66 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 30.

67 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 19.

68 Paraphrased, Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 19.

This study is aligned with what Wright called a multi-dimensional approach, because I explore the film text and the cinematic context, and critical receptions. The selection of films to be analyzed in this thesis is, following Wright's argument, relevant to my research questions and the problems I discuss.

David Morgan's *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*,<sup>69</sup> in which he deals with religious images and their diverse and changing meanings in the public sphere is useful here. His study on religious images and visual practices aims "to provide an interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion" and as such provides a good ground for the research of religion by different scholars of diverse disciplines. Morgan's study contributes to an understanding of the function of religious images within different religious groups and their social and cultural aspects. Morgan's discussion on subversion of religious images and their social function was pertinent for the purpose of this thesis and my analysis of religious images in the selected films. I analyse the function of religious images in popular culture, and how the films depicted the existing shift of religious images to social images in the popular culture of the 1990s. The subversion of religious images in the films I discuss takes place in two ways: first, the films use the iconic images of the 1990s, to show how religion was connected to aggressive nationalism, and second, some of the sacred images of Christian faith are used as *mise-en-scene*, to communicate exactly the opposite meaning from what these images originally represented. In the context of the narrative of both films the images show the transition of a sacred into a social image that expresses national rather than ecclesiastical meaning. I investigate how the sacred images of the Orthodox faith became political symbols of the 1990s. They represented symbols of the exclusion of others. This exclusion stands directly against the Church and its claim to be rooted in the early Church Christian theology that is based on unity of all people in Christ and not on the unity of *a nation* (my italics) in Christ. Morgan's work provided a theoretical framework for my investigation of the function of religious images in the context of the 1990s, and consequently in the films. In my research I take a step

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<sup>69</sup> Morgan, David: *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005.

further in that I explore how the visual can express the social context and eventually subvert the iconic images of popular culture providing in such a way a critique of the socio-political practice.

Martin and Ostwalt in their book on religion, myth and ideology in popular American films<sup>70</sup>, propose a new type in film criticism which would be “a blend of theological, mythological and ideological criticism.”<sup>71</sup> This study contributed to my research in several respects. First, the authors recognize the importance of focusing on political aspects of the contemporary films claiming that film has “the potential to reinforce, to challenge, to overturn, or to crystallize religious perspectives, ideological assumptions, and fundamental values.”<sup>72</sup> They devote a significant space to the issue of *myth* (my italics), which is one of the issues I tackle in this study and as a part of a discussion on national-religious ideology. The claim exposed in this book that “Hollywood ...creates a great number of mythic heroes”<sup>73</sup> is an important point of view for considering Serbian film of the 1990s as one influenced by Hollywood cinema and thus as one that applies global stereotypes. In this sense, in my analysis of the characters of the selected films I deal primarily with the representation of anti-heroes. Anti-heroes cannot, as I will argue later, support the national myths affirmed in the political ideology of the 1990s, but actually can only subvert them. This is a problem that will be discussed later towards the end of this study. Second, the authors in this book “define religion in different ways” and popular films are “communicating religious meanings, mythic stories, and bedrock ideological values.”<sup>74</sup>

Further, the authors claim that “by looking critically at films, we can learn a good deal about religion in the United States.”<sup>75</sup> In this study I explore how the Serbian films of the 1990s inform us about religion in Serbia, how they depict its connection

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70 Martin, Joel and Ostwalt, Conrade Eugene, eds.: *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film*, Boulder, Colorado; Oxford: Westview Press, 1995.

71 Martin, Joel and Ostwalt, Conrade Eugene: *Ibid*, p.7.

72 Martin, Joel and Ostwalt, Conrade Eugene: *Ibid*, Preface, vii

73 Martin, Joel and Ostwalt, Conrade Eugene: *Ibid*, p.70.

74 Martin, Joel and Ostwalt, Conrade Eugene: *Ibid*, Preface, vii

75 Martin, Joel and Ostwalt, Conrade Eugene: *Ibid*, Preface, viii

to the political ideology embodied in nationalism, and how therefore they reflect ideological values of the 1990s. Finally, the authors identified that in film criticism there appeared “terms such as alienation, ideology, plenitude and resistance”<sup>76</sup> which point to the complex structure of film as a product of specific socio-political conditions, that certainly deserves more attention in film studies and should not be overlooked by scholars of film and religion either.

## **2.2. Socio-Political Background Literature**

For the purpose of this study, especially Chapter 3 I investigated a large body of work and studies on the Balkans, its history, politics and culture. My focus was primarily on Serbia within the Yugoslav and Balkan geographical and socio-political context. My research included an investigation of its history and culture in a wider sense and for the purpose of identifying and contextualizing the period on which I am focused, which is from the mid-1980s throughout the 1990s. In order to, for example, discuss the religious ideology of the 1990s, it was important to back track to its origins and its connection to the concept of nationhood, how it was in previous historical periods and what political applications it had then and how that relates to now. My research included a large body of different studies, papers, on-line articles and archive data that were relevant to this topic. The scholars that wrote books and studies on Yugoslavia and Serbia, its culture, politics and religion, or tried to define this cultural-political space of the Balkans, are from different disciplines: cultural studies, anthropology, political sciences, media studies and finally theology.

Since I am primarily focused on the issue of nationalism and its connection to Serbian Orthodoxy I have investigated particularly the period in which this ideology prevailed, which is the second half of the 1980s. This ideology, which became a pillar of the Milosevic regime, was a precursor to the break-up of Yugoslavia and the civil war. Therefore my focus was on the literature and work of different authors and scholars on this topic. My sources were primarily Serbian scholars and authors, but I

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<sup>76</sup> Martin, Joel and Ostwalt, Conrade Eugene: *Ibid*, p. 2.

have included several studies by foreign scholars and analysts. Since I am primarily focused on the problem of nationalist-religious ideology, its formation, characteristics and promotion in the public sphere, I narrowed my research on the literature that dealt more explicitly with these issues. Here I discuss the works and papers that were the most helpful in my research.

From rich material written on the break-up of Yugoslavia I selected the most helpful works for the discussion on this topic. Authors such as Christopher Bennet,<sup>77</sup> Misha Glenny,<sup>78</sup> Robert Thomas,<sup>79</sup> James Gow,<sup>80</sup> Maria Todorova,<sup>81</sup> Vesna Goldsworthy<sup>82</sup> are a few among many whose work provided me with understanding of the variety of different discussions and diverse aspects of the Yugoslav break-up and Serbia's role in this process. Their research on socio-political and cultural characteristics of the Milosevic regime helped me in framing the most important aspects of the ideological impacts on Serbian society.

The doctoral thesis and post doctoral research of Dejan Jovic, professor at the department of political studies at the University of Stirling, on Yugoslavia's disintegration was published as a book and represents an “analysis of political events through the interaction of text and context.”<sup>83</sup> In this analysis Jovic gave rich insight into Yugoslav history, politics, economy, international relations and ideologies. One of what he called “newspaper explanations” of the war, based on the argument of so called historical, “ancient hate” that existed among Yugoslav people, Jovic dismisses as an inaccurate and populist interpretation which offered oversimplified explanations.<sup>84</sup> Jovic's recognition that ideology has a central place in “ideocratic

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77 Bennet, Christopher: *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, London: Hurst & Company, 1996.

78 Glenny, Misha: *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, London: Penguin Books, 1996; Glenny, Misha: *The Balkans, 1804-1999: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*, London: Granta Books, 2000.

79 Thomas, Robert: *Serbia under Milosevic: Politics in the 1990s*, London: Hurst & Company, 1999.

80 Gow, James: *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, London: Hurst&Company, 1997.

81 Todorova, Maria: *Imagining the Balkans*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

82 Goldsworthy, Vesna: *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1998.

83 Jovic, Dejan: *Jugoslavija – drzava koja je odumrla: uspon, kriza i pad Cetrte Jugoslavije*, Beograd: Samizdat, 2003, p. 13.

84 Jovic, Dejan: *Ibid*, p. 37-44.

states”<sup>85</sup>, such as was socialist Yugoslavia, was of significant importance for this research project. Although Jovic uses this recognition as an argument for his further discussion on the causes of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, this point was helpful to me in my analysis of the political background of the 1990s. In this sense I consider the 1990s ideology as being central and at the core of the regime's politics. Ideology aims to motivate political action and we can observe the development of the crisis and the war as a consequence of ideology, the new political ideology, formed in the late 1980s, that replaced the socialist one. This is an important point for this dissertation whose focus is an analysis of the nationalist-religious ideology.

The study of historian Latinka Perovic, *Izmedju anarhije i autokratije*<sup>86</sup> (*Between Anarchy and Autocracy*, my translation), was extremely helpful in framing the historical background of the political thought in Serbia, which was important for contextualizing the political ideas and ideology discussed in Chapter 3. Perovic provides an important insight into the political conflicts that existed in Serbia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, between so called liberals and people's option, which to a great extent influenced the later definitions and understanding of the modern state. Giving a review of the socio-political thought and events of the last century, Perovic sheds light on different influences that shaped the so-called Serbian concept of the state, and the pro-Western and anti-Western attitudes regarding this subject. In this sense her work enriched my study, in defining the origins and different concepts of the Serbian national state, how these ideas were developing in specific historical circumstances and how some of these ideas were significantly influenced or supported by the Orthodox Church. Although her work does not explicitly deal with the religious issues, she identified subjects such as *patriarchalism* or *collectivism and individualism*<sup>87</sup> (my italics) as ideas that were shaping political thought were highly important for defining the connection between religiosity and nationhood in the Serbian context. Perovic identified that the so called Serbian national question,

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85 Jovic, Dejan: *Ibid*, p. 13.

86 Perovic, Latinka: *Izmedju anarhije i autokratije: srpsko drustvo na prelazima vekova (XIX-XXI)*, Beograd: Helsinski odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Ogledi Br. 8, 2006.

87 See Perovic, Latinka: *Ibid*, p. 43-47, also discussion in chapter 2.



related to the question of Serbian state and nationhood, was inseparable from religion.<sup>88</sup> Perovic's work contributed to my research providing important material for the historical frame for my discussion in Chapter 3.

Other works on the break-up of Yugoslavia were helpful in identifying crucial political events connected to the emergence of nationalist discourse. Political discussions on the causes and reasons of Yugoslavia's disintegration were helpful in understanding that when we speak of this subject we must encounter many different factors from economic to cultural, and at the same time consider the international context, since the break-up of Yugoslavia took part after the fall of the Berlin wall and the disintegration of the Eastern block. Works of Serbian scholars of various disciplines published in the book *Srpska strana rata*<sup>89</sup> (*The Serbian side of the War*), were extremely helpful on defining the basic tenets of this political ideology, and the issues of nationhood and religion. The most interesting works were by authors who dealt with the use of mythological discourse and its emergence in the public sphere.

Here I discuss several studies which are directly relevant to my work. The work of Radmila Radic, Serbian historian, who investigated the role of the Serbian Church in political life of the 1980s and 1990s, provided important material and documents, from articles published by the Church to reviews of socio-political events in which the Church actively took part. Her analysis includes discussion of the connection between nation and religion in Serbia. Olivera Milosavljevic<sup>90</sup> and Ger Duijzings<sup>91</sup> focused on the different aspects of the *Kosovo Myth* and its political use. In Chapter 3 I analyse the *Kosovo Myth* as an example in which religious and national converged. Serbian anthropologist Ivan Colovic<sup>92</sup> wrote on Serbian national myths and their role in the regime's war-propaganda. His analysis of the mythological

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88 See Perovic, Latinka: *Ibid*, p. 24.

89 Popov, Nebojsa, ed.: *Srpska strana rata*, Beograd: Bigz, 1996.

90 Milosavljevic, Olivera: "Zloupotreba autoriteta nauke" in Popov, Nebojsa, ed.: *Srpska strana rata*, Beograd: BIGZ, 1996.

91 Duijzings, Ger: *Religion and the Politics of the Identity in Kosovo*, London: Hurst & Company, 2000.

92 Colovic, Ivan: *Politika simbola*, Beograd: Fond za otvoreno drustvo, 2000, also Colovic, Ivan: *Bordel ratnika: folklor, politika i rat*, Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 1994.

discourse that was prevailing in the public sphere was equally important for my analysis of the nationalist-religious ideology and the analysis of the selected films. Radivoje Radic dealt with the emergence of pseudo-history in the Serbian public sphere. Pseudo-history was an important part of the ideological discourse which coexisted from national and religious myths, and its function was to represent Serbs as a unique nation in the world and to support the ongoing process of homogenization. How far these claims went Radic described in his book *Serbs before and after Adam*<sup>93</sup> (*Srbi pre Adama i posle njega*). There are two reasons for focusing on pseudo history: first, because of its importance in the *vox populi* of Milosevic's propaganda machinery and second, because this phenomenon was depicted in the films. Films such as for example *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* provide an insight into how the pseudo-historical content mixed with national-religious myths influenced ordinary people. This problem will be discussed in Chapter 5.

For the purpose of this study and analysis of the films I also read the original texts on which some of the films were based. First, I read the drama of Ljubomir Simovic<sup>94</sup> on which the film *The Battle of Kosovo* was based. It is important to note that I refer to the first version, since Simovic later published a revised version of this drama. This was important for my analysis of the political discourse of the Milosevic regime expressed through this drama, written by a political playwright whose writing embodied the discourse of the 1980s. Second, it helped me to understand the extent to which academics were shaping this ideological discourse. Although I do not analyse Simovic's drama in this thesis, and I only briefly discuss the film based on it, this text provided me with an understanding of the interconnection between the nationalism promoted by politicians and religious ideology formed within the Church. Contextualizing this text within the specific socio-political frame helped me to identify characteristics of nationalist-religious ideology and its use as a political weapon.

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93 Radic, Radivoj: *Srbi pre Adama i posle njega*, Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 2003.

94 Simovic, Ljubomir: *Boj na Kosovu*, Beograd: Srpska knjizevna zadruga, 1989.

*Tunel*<sup>95</sup> a novel by Vanja Bulic is the the next text that I considered for the purpose of this thesis, since it was used as an idea for Dragojevic's film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. Bulic's text has nothing in common with the film version, except for the fact that the main characters are trapped in the tunnel. Everything else was changed. Although Vanja Bulic was one of the screen writers, comparison of his text to the film, brought me to the inevitable conclusion that Dragojevic shaped the story in his own way, which from glorification of Serbian sufferings turned into a black comedy about undeserved glorification of Serbian warriors, which in the end gave the film a completely new meaning and consequently caused many debates. Although I do not compare the original Bulic text to the film in this thesis, it was a useful framework for my analysis to have an insight into the background of the creation of the film.

My research also included the original novel of Slobodan Selenic, *Ubistvo s Predumisljajem*<sup>96</sup> (*Premeditated Murder*) on which the film of the same title, directed by Gorcin Stojanovic, was based. Although I do not analyse Selenic's book it was helpful to see the extent to which the director followed the original text, and how he integrated his own personal touch in his depiction of ideological conflicts.

In order to define religious ideology I have investigated a range of theological literature, writings of contemporary Serbian theologians, and books and articles published by the Church. This was first as a basis for my analysis of the religious ideology and nationalism that occurred within the Church, and second because my intention was to do comparative analysis, by looking at how these ideas overlapped with the official political, nationalist discourse. This religious ideology was represented and mainly justified as an attempt to preserve the Serbian national identity and its so called specific culture that Velimirovic defined as “above the East and above the West.”<sup>97</sup> In order to highlight in this work some of the basic arguments of Serbian theologians, I summarize them through the careful selection of the most

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95 Bulic, Vanja: *Tunel: Lepa sela, lepo gore*, Beogradski izdavacko-graficki zavod, drugo izdanje, Beograd: Narodna biblioteka Srbije, izv.broj: 59.088, Beograd: 11/02/1997.

96 Selenic, Slobodan: *Ubistvo s predumisljajem*, Beograd: Prosveta, 1996.

97 Velimirovic, Nikolaj: *Iznad istoka i zapada*, [http://www.verujem.org/savremeni\\_teolozi\\_azbucni.htm](http://www.verujem.org/savremeni_teolozi_azbucni.htm)

important texts, which are discussed in Chapter 3.

I chose therefore, besides contemporary Church leaders and theologians that were active during the Milosevic regime, also theologians whose work shaped later theological arguments on nationhood and church. I primarily considered the works of Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic<sup>98</sup>, a 20th-century theologian, who died in the 1950s but whose work influenced later theologians, mainly bishops who represented a kind of elite formed in the Serbian Orthodox Church in the mid 1980s. This elite was influencing the Church's politics during the 1990s and their influence has remained strong until today. First I analyse the concept of the nationalist-religious ideology in Velimirovic's work. Second, I look at its later implications in the 1990s. To analyse this interconnection between Velimirovic's work, 1990s Serbian Church leaders and political ideology of the regime I chose the book that is the most representative for this purpose: *The Philosophy of War: The Lamb of God and the the Beast from Abyss*.<sup>99</sup>

Why was it important to analyse separately the nationalist-religious ideology formed within the Church? First, because most of the studies on Serbia and the Yugoslav war, which dealt with the Milosevic regime, failed to frame completely the importance and impacts of the Church in creation of the political national ideology of the 1990s. Most of them did successfully frame the role of the Church in this period, providing rich data on what the Church was actually doing and what political moves it undertook. Some of them, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of national myths, analysing the discourse of the mythological language, and identified a lot of religious elements that proved to be inseparable from the national ones. What really lacked was more detailed discussion on the main premises of the religious ideology that existed within the Church, how and when it was formed, how it was used for political purposes and how it connected so naturally to the official regime's

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98 Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Nacionalizam Svetog Save*,  
[http://www.verujem.org/savremeni\\_teolozi\\_azbucni.htm](http://www.verujem.org/savremeni_teolozi_azbucni.htm)

99 Group of Authors: *Jagnje Bozije i zvijer iz bezdana*,  
<http://www.mitropolija.cg.yu/duhovnost/jagnje/>

ideology, and why it was so successful.

It is important, however, to make a distinction between what I call religious ideology and Orthodoxy itself, meaning mainly its liturgical aspect and the universality that emanates from this. Religious ideology of the 1990s, based on the works of theologians from earlier periods such as Velimirovic, represents a form of *deviation from Orthodoxy* (my italics). The deviation is primarily to be found in the abandonment of unity in Christ for the sake of the national, in other words putting nationhood at the centre of the Church's activity, theology and mission instead of the liturgical praxis. My thesis is not a theological study; rather, I discuss the deviation of theology into national ideology, the deviation of religious praxis into the socio-political praxis of exclusion of *others* (my italics). This discussion is for the purpose of the further analysis of films (chapters, 4, 5, and 6) and socio-political context of the 1990s (chapter 3). I do not discuss what liturgical praxis means from the point of view of Orthodox theology, rather I discuss the deviation from this praxis in the social life of the Church. What does this mean? It means, as we will see in Chapter 3, that many prominent theologians in their preaching after the Liturgy were calling on national unity rather than to unity in Christ. By providing an insight into the perspective of the Church on national issues and analysing the main tenets of the nationalist-religious ideology, my study contributes to those fields which dealt with the ideology of the Milosevic regime and explored the changing identities and national and religious issues in the Balkans. Nationalist-religious ideology, which survived Milosevic's downfall and found its new expressions in the socio-political context after 2000 within the right wing national parties, remains a central issue in contemporary Serbia, which is one of the reasons why I believe that this discussion needs to be continued in the future. How the nationalist-religious ideology, its symbolism and rhetoric, which I discuss in chapter 4, was represented in the films, is what I focus on in the analysis of the films.

In this part of the chapter I have surveyed the most significant works that were directly relevant and helpful to my thesis and chapter 3, which is on the socio-

political context of the 1990s. In the next section I will discuss the literature written primarily on Serbian cinema, which is rooted in traditions of Yugoslav cinema, and which will therefore also be briefly discussed.

### **2.3. Balkan Cinema Literature**

In this section I will focus on literature that was of vital importance for my thesis and film analysis, and as such was a primary resource for my research. I divide this section into two parts. In the first part I survey the literature on Yugoslav cinema. Discussion of Yugoslav film was important in my thesis for two reasons, first for the historical contextualization of Serbian film and for understanding the traditions and influences that it had, and second, because it has importance for the further discussion of the cinema of the 1990s, that develops in Serbia and after the break-up of Yugoslavia.

In the second part of this section I focus on the rich body of literature written on the Serbian cinema of the 1990s by different scholars and critics. The purpose of this was to consider how these discussions informed my study and how my analysis of films contributes to the research on Serbian film and in this sense enriches diverse perspectives and develops new approaches in studying Balkan cinema.

#### **2.3.1. Historical Frame: Yugoslav Cinema**

My research included a number of different books, articles and critiques written on Serbian cinema, recognized as a part of the Balkan cinema and the East European cinema. Discussion of Serbian cinema of the 1990s often included various discussions of Yugoslav cinema. For my thesis it was important to discuss a historical frame of Serbian cinema which I do in Chapter 4. In this chapter I focus primarily on the period of the 1960s known for the *Black Wave* movement. There are two reasons for this: historical and socio-political contextualization of Serbian cinema, and shedding light on diverse traditions that influenced Yugoslav cinema

and therefore later Serbian cinema. Such a historical frame enables understanding of the diverse perspectives and discussions on the *character* (my italics) of the films of the 1990s. My sources were films produced in this time period (1960s-1970s). Of great help in understanding the *Black Wave* movement was a documentary *Censored Without Censorship* in which *auteurs* of this period give authentic statements about the movement, its cultural and socio-political importance, revealing the background of the film making process and the cinematic traditions that influenced them. Interviews with some of the directors, such as Zelimir Zilnik, available on-line, were of great help in understanding the *Black Wave* and its authors, the specific socio-political and cultural circumstances and their vision of the issues of totalitarian ideologies.

Besides the Serbian literature on the history of Yugoslav cinema, most beneficial was Daniel Goulding's study: *Liberated Cinema*. Goulding offers not only rich material on the history and development of Yugoslav cinematography but also provides an important and interesting analysis of the *Black Wave* movement. Goulding's exploration on this movement, gives an analysis of *Black Wave* film framed by the discussion on its importance as *praxis*.<sup>100</sup> As Goulding notices *praxis* connects to aesthetics as a form of "complete freedom of artistic expression"<sup>101</sup> which has the function of responsible criticism of existing conditions in society.<sup>102</sup> This criticism includes strong opposition to "dogma and myths in all its forms."<sup>103</sup> Goulding's study is not only informative regarding the most important aspects of the *Black Wave* and the historical contextualization of Serbian cinema, also it gave me direction in research on possible forms of subversiveness and ideological criticism in the cinema of the 1990s, especially when it comes to the cinematic representation of national and religious popular myths. In my study I will be exploring the new cinematic forms

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100 Goulding notices that the stance of some of the *Black Wave auteurs* was close to the philosophical radicalism of the *Praxis* group. To explain what *praxis* is and what it is not, Goulding quotes philosopher Danko Grlic's "most radical Marxist-derived formulation" in which Grlic argued that practice is "opposed to everything established" and stands against all that is "passive, merely meditative, non-creative". See Goulding, Daniel: *Liberated Cinema: the Yugoslav Experience*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, p. 81.

101 Goulding, Daniel: *Ibid*, p. 81.

102 Goulding, Daniel: *Ibid*, p. 81.

103 Goulding, Daniel: *Ibid*, p. 81.

of subversion through the analysis of film representation of ideology and myths in the popular discourse of the 1990s.

It is a matter of future discussions whether or not the *Black Wave* echoes in later cinematic works in Serbia. For the purpose of this study, however it is important to consider this historical frame for further discussions of 1990s cinema and for considering whether it was influenced by different trends and movements in Yugoslav cinema. For this reason it is important to include the *Black Wave* in this discussion and draw attention to the tradition of politically engaged cinema. Although I am not doing comparative analysis between the films from these two periods, I consider the historical frame as important for further discussion on cinematic developments.

In this regard, Dusan Bjelic's study on the cinema of the 1990s was beneficial for my research. Bjelic, relying on Frederick Jameson's theory, made an important distinction between *resistance* and *subversiveness* (my italics) in film, recognizing resistance as a characteristic of the national cinema, as for example the *Black Wave* was, while subversiveness, which takes place within certain ideological discourse, Bjelic finds in the 1990s cinema. This means, for example, that national cinemas can adopt global aesthetics, stereotypes and so-called Hollywood style and then subvert them. In this case we no longer speak only about national cinema but about "global cinema", as Jameson suggested. Stereotypes deployed in global cinema can thus frequently be subverted. Scholars such as Dina Iordanova and Frederick Jameson, in their studies on contemporary Serbian film, gave significant space to the *Black Wave* and its directors, because of its aesthetic uniqueness and the socio-political criticism expressed in it.

### 2.3.2. Studies of the 1990s Serbian Cinema

Literature on the cinema of the 1990s includes work both by Serbian and foreign scholars who wrote on this topic. My research also includes a number of different



articles written by film critics, interviews with directors, and film reviews. In this section I will discuss the scholars who dealt with different aspects of Serbian cinema of the 1990s and that were the most useful for my research, for example Igor Krstic, Nevena Dakovic, Ivana Kronja, Dusan Bjelic and Tomislav Z. Longinovic.

Ivana Kronja considered the Serbian film of the 1990s as a part of the culture of violence.<sup>104</sup> She argues that Serbian film makers were strongly influenced by American film genre, from classical gangster films and film noir, to “contemporary classics” of Coppola and Tarantino.<sup>105</sup> In her discussion on violence in contemporary Serbian cinema she finds that the film makers failed in representing the causes of violence but depicted it more as a consequence. She makes an exception in the case of *Wounds*, which as she admits “deals with media manipulation” that was responsible for “hate and violence promotion.”<sup>106</sup> Kronja, however, did not find that films criticized violence, but rather they were “a pale reflection of the real violence in society.”<sup>107</sup> The film *Wounds* is the one I selected for my analysis of the representation of ideology, and I will suggest exactly the opposite, that this film did in fact point to the causes of the society's violent culture. It interrogated in a subtle way an ideology of violence.

How the nationalist-religious ideology was an ideology of violence and a call to arms is a part of the discussion in Chapter 4 particularly but it is also discussed in other chapters as a part of the film analysis. What is important, however, is Kronja's question whether “we can fight the violence with the scenes of violence”<sup>108</sup> or not. This question stands for all films that deal both with the war and street violence, and has been a matter of wider debates.<sup>109</sup> The responses would certainly depend on the audience. My intention is to suggest that Serbian films, specifically *Wounds*, did

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104 Kronja, Ivana: *Violence as a Cause of and a Response to Frustration: Serbian Cinema and Violence Culture, 1990-2004*, <http://www.interdisciplinary.net/ati/violence/v5/kronja%20paper.pdf>

105 Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid.*

106 Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid.*

107 Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid.*

108 Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid.*

109 See Mitchell, Jolyon: *Media Violence and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

depict street violence and brutality of youngsters as a consequence of the specific culture of the 1990s that was shaped by pro-war ideology.

Igor Krstic framed his discussion of Serbian cinema with the question of “politically correct cinema”<sup>110</sup>, choosing in his own words to deal only with films which took a clearly “Serbian perspective.”<sup>111</sup> Krstic approaches films as “cultural text” in order to provide a “psychoanalytic reading of Serbian cultural self reflection.”<sup>112</sup> Krstic explores the construction of “self” and “other”<sup>113</sup> related to collective identification in three Serbian films, *Underground*, *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, and *Wounds*. By using “Lacanian categories of subject”<sup>114</sup>, Krstic explores psychological themes in the films. Krstic argues that the films were “highly controversial” due to the fact that “they position the viewer unconsciously to identify with those who raped women and burned villages...”<sup>115</sup> Krstic further provides discussion on films' iconography and its symbolism. Although he is using a psychoanalytic reading of the films to discuss cultural conflicts and issues of identity, his study highlighted several important issues for this thesis. First, Krstic considers films' *mise-en-scene*<sup>116</sup> as an important element in his analysis, and symbols and images make an important part of the discussion on Serbian films. He does not separate the film text from the visual, but studies them as equally important. This is the approach that I use in this study, considering the film text, context, image and the sound, as equally important in my analysis and for the purpose of fuller understanding of the films.

Second, Krstic considers how the film communicates to the audience, giving the viewers a “Serbian perspective”<sup>117</sup>, a problem that other scholars such as Dina Iordanova discussed, and which certainly caused the diverse interpretation of the

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110 Krstic, Igor: *Re-thinking Serbia: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture*, Other Voices, V.2, N.2, (March 2002), <http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/krstic/index.html>

111 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

112 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

113 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

114 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

115 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

116 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

117 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

films, including the stances that films represented clearly pro-Serbian propaganda. This positioning of the audience to identify with perpetrators at the time when the war was still going on became an issue and caused wide spread debates on films, opening political questions of politically correct and incorrect films. Drawing on Krstic's ideas, I will try to demonstrate that the films I analyse in this thesis, are indeed providing a Serbian perspective which actually represent a form of self-reflection, through the representation of the local myths and ideologies, but not necessarily for propaganda purposes.

Third, Krstic argues that the ideological discourse promoted by the regime through their media, and with support of the Church and other important institutions and politicians, imposed “fantasies of ethnic nationalism so effectively...that the people passionately took up these ethnic identities and reconstruction of previous neighbours as blood enemies.”<sup>118</sup> This claim of Krstic is a significant point. This thesis points to the significance and importance of nationalist-religious ideology. By looking at its representation in the films I look at how “cinematic representations play a vital role in constructing, reflecting or subverting those narratives.”<sup>119</sup> I look at how the films depicted ideology and how in this sense they inform us about popular religion and nationalism of the 1990s. It is a matter of further discussion whether the film subverted or simply reflected this ideological discourse.

Looking at the representation of the civil war in Serbian films, Nevena Dakovic argued that the films offered a mythical view of the conflict.<sup>120</sup> By this Dakovic considers representation of the Balkans as the keg of gunpowder that has the potential to explode at any time into the conflict in which everyone is a victim. Mythical concept also includes the concept of “Balkans destiny” in which people are “doomed” and as such prone to eternal conflict.<sup>121</sup> This argument was actually conceptualized in the ideological discourse of the 1990s, which I discuss in chapter

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118 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

119 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

120 Dakovic, Nevena: *Yugoslav wars: Between Myth and Reality*,  
<http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/mpi/Activities/Media%20Practice%20Spring%202002/dakovic.htm>.

121 Dakovic, Nevena: *Ibid.*

3. Dakovic finds similarity between the official ideological justification of the war (which I discuss in Chapter 4) and cinematic explanation of the war. This is due to the “metaphorical appearances”<sup>122</sup> that she identifies in some of the films and that in her opinion have the function of showing the war stereotypically as a consequence of the Balkans' destiny. Such representation on the other hand, according to Dakovic, gives to the story a universal character that can be related to any part of the world. Dakovic however did not explore enough the function of such metaphors in films, which can be differently interpreted depending on whether or not we read the “sub-context of the film.”<sup>123</sup>

Mythical representation of Yugoslav wars can be considered a part of larger discussion of stereotypical representation of the Balkans, which has been discussed by different scholars such as Maria Todorova, Dina Iordanova, Frederick Jameson and Tomislav Longinovic. This problem that exists within Balkan cinema can be identified as depicting the Balkans through the Western gaze. As Iordanova argues it is hard to find subversion within Balkans cinematic representation of itself among contemporary film makers, who “feel obliged to be apologetic”<sup>124</sup> in their dialogue with the rest of Europe and thus their work reflects rather a “voluntary self-disintegration.”<sup>125</sup> According to her this is a consequence of a “Eurocentric construct” which opens a possibility for “positioning the Balkans as geographically part of Europe, but conceptually excluded from the European cultural space.”<sup>126</sup>

Tomislav Longinovic described this problem as: the symptom of internalized culture of “self-Balkanization” articulated by the authors as a response both to the exclusion of their native locations from the Western vision of civilization and an implicit critique of the domestic glorifications of righteous uses of violence.<sup>127</sup> Unlike other scholars, Longinovic argues that the foreign audiences were unable to escape “the

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122 Dakovic, Nevena: *Ibid.*

123 Dakovic, Nevena: *Ibid.*

124 Iordanova, Dina: *Cinema of Flames*, London: British Film Institute, 2001, p. 67

125 Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid.*, p.67

126 Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid.*, p.58

127 Longinovic, Tomislav: “Playing the Western Eye: Balkan Masculinity and Post-Yugoslav War Cinema” in Imre, Aniko, ed.: *East European Cinemas*, New York, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 46

ethnological approach to the lesser-known area of the world” and that as such they often took “one or the other moral stand.”<sup>128</sup>

This thesis contributes to this discussion that exists among the scholars who identified some of the major problems within Balkan and Serbian cinema, by providing a different approach to the analysis of the films. Regarding Dakovic's argument on the mythical representation of the wars, I investigate this problem as a part of an exploration of ideology. First I investigate the socio-political context and its ideological discourse, in which local mythologies such as *the Kosovo Myth* played a crucial role in representing the conflict as a part of an eternal cycle. Second, I explore how such ideology was depicted on the big screen, and how and to what extent the cinema informs us about ideological discourse in Serbian society. Third, I explore whether this depiction was subversive or whether the films were just reflecting regime's ideology. In this sense, as an important part of my research I consider Bjelic's argument that the national cinema can deploy stereotypes in order to subvert them<sup>129</sup>, and Krstic's suggestion that cinema representations can often reflect or subvert the existing narratives of society. For example, in Chapter 5 (analysis of the film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*), as a part of the analysis of the characters, I will consider the character of an American journalist, who is kind of a mirror for Serbian self-perspective in their dialogue with the West where they are communicating their own identities.

Frederick Jameson in his work “Thoughts on Balkan Cinema”, discussed the problem of stereotypical representations of the Balkans, considering the concept of the “the wild man of the Balkans,”<sup>130</sup> the stereotype which determines that “the South Slavs are naturally violent and aggressive.”<sup>131</sup> Jameson also notices, as Iordanova does, which we will see in the later discussion, that the Balkans authors considered

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128 Longinovic, Tomislav: *Ibid*, p. 37.

129 Bjelic, Dusan: “Global Aesthetics and the Serbian Cinema of the 1990s” in Imre, Aniko, ed.: *East European Cinemas*, New York, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 104.

130 Jameson, Frederick: “Thoughts on the Balkan Cinema” in Egoan, Atom and Balfour, Ian ed.: *Subtitles, On the Foreignness of Film*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2004: *Ibid*, p. 233.

131 Jameson, Frederick: *Ibid*, p. 233.

the Western, stereotypical gaze on this part of the world to be a consequence of alienation. This alienation, he argues, comes as a result of “the Other’s” view on the Balkans, which is reducing people of this area to a stereotype.<sup>132</sup> The stereotypical vision of Balkans and Serbs, brings frustration that we can find in the work of authors from this area, including film directors. Jameson’s argument was helpful to my analysis, especially of the characters in films such as *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, where the group of people trapped in a tunnel is, metaphorically, not only in the trap of their own beliefs in local mythologies shaped by different ideologies but also trapped in exclusion from the rest of the world. Inspired by Slavoj Žižek’s view on identities issues in former Yugoslavia, Jameson proposes a wider historical frame when discussing this area, rather than confining ourselves to “the short, violent and...stereotyped memory of Bosnia and the Kosovo war.”<sup>133</sup>

Similarly to other scholars Jameson considers the importance of historical contextualization whether we speak about the Balkans itself, wars, or cinematic representations of these issues. In this work I contextualize the discussion on Serbian cinema in the specific socio-political and historical frame, which has the importance of explaining the context that was surrounding these films, in the first place the 1990s ideology and its historical background. In his further discussion on national cinema of the 1990s Jameson singles out two Serbian films, *Keg of Gunpowder* and *Wounds*. Although he admits that these films can be observed as ones which correspond to some extent to the American tradition, he finds specific forms of expression in representing violence. In *Wounds* “the wild man” is subordinated to the caricature of itself<sup>134</sup>, while in *Keg of Gunpowder* he represents a powder keg, who instead of providing expected anger provokes sympathy<sup>135</sup> and he is “uncivilized...in the sense that he doesn’t want to be alienated or imprisoned by other people.”<sup>136</sup> Jameson also argues that *Wounds* introduced media as a generator of violence,

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132 Jameson, Frederick: *Ibid*, p. 234.

133 Jameson, Frederick: *Ibid*, p. 236.

134 Jameson, Frederick: *Ibid*, p. 253.

135 Jameson, Frederick: *Ibid*, p. 255.

136 Jameson, Frederick: *Ibid*, p. 255.

“which in this case is the same as violence itself.”<sup>137</sup> The notion of media influences on the escalation of violence is an issue that has already been mentioned and will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis. Jameson concludes that both films represent “extraordinary testimony to the ongoing vitality of cinema from the former Yugoslavia.”<sup>138</sup> Jameson's work considerably influenced my research on the representation of characters that are on the border of what Jameson called “grotesque comic book figures.”<sup>139</sup>

One of the major studies on the Serbian cinema of the 1990s is Dina Iordanova's *Cinema of Flames*.<sup>140</sup> Iordanova's work was pertinent for this research for several reasons. She provided a rich review of Serbian films produced over the 1990s, focussing upon the most controversial ones. Iordanova framed the most important issues emanating from these films and the discussions that surrounded them. Her methodology is based on contextual analysis, not only of Serbian film as a part of what she calls the Balkan Cinema, but primarily of Serbian film as a part of a very particular socio-political context of the 1990s. Her exploration of Serbian film focuses on specific films and directors and on the controversy that usually surrounded these films. Since Iordanova is focused more upon contextual analysis, her reading of films is inseparable from the discussion of the socio-political and cultural context of Serbia. In Chapter ix of her book, which is devoted to media representation of victims and villains, Iordanova for example discusses *turbo-folk* (my italics), and the phenomenon and media glorification of war criminals.<sup>141</sup>

Iordanova also provided a rich discussion on the film production and the connections of the directors to certain political structures. More importantly, Iordanova draws attention to the diverse reception that films, such as *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, had among the audiences and film critics. The diverse and often contradictory perceptions of this film reveal its ambiguity, which encouraged me to investigate

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137 Jameson, Frederick: *Ibid*, p. 254.

138 Jameson, Frederick: *Ibid*, p. 256.

139 Jameson, Frederick: *Ibid*, p. 254.

140 Iordanova, Dina: *Cinema of Flames*, London: British Film Institute, 2001.

141 See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*.

different layers of the film that were overlooked in existing studies on Serbian cinema, including the work of scholars such as Iordanova. For the purpose of my research Iordanova's discussion of Srdjan Dragojevic's film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* was useful. This discussion is basically framed by the question whether or not this film was Serbian propaganda, and whether the film took sides in the representation of the conflict. Iordanova, however, identified important issues in Serbian films, such as the representation of the war, stereotypes, identity and political criticism (or the lack of it). Although she notices that the film is telling the story from the Serbian perspective, Iordanova does not analyse this perspective, rather she gives an insight into the diverse discussions that were surrounding this film.

Iordanova did not take the approach of textual analysis nor did she analyse for example religious and national images in the film and its relation to the text of the film. The Serbian perspective, that she correctly identified particularly in the film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (but what was also a commonly identified issue in other films), is not analysed, and therefore Iordanova overlooks the important elements of such a perspective. A Serbian perspective in this sense, can mean depiction of local myths and ideologies rather than simply a justification of the war. In other words, I argue that for example myths represented in the film can inform us about the ideological discourse of the 1990s, and that their function in the film is far more complex which is an issue that needs to be further explored. Even in the case of *Wounds*, a film certainly less complicated than *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, and that Iordanova briefly discusses, little space is devoted to the detailed film analysis. With such an approach she fails to identify in which particular way the film represented criminalization, was this criminalization shown to be connected to the war and political structures, were there any national and religious symbols in the film that inform us about the ideological background of these criminals, who after all were recognized, as she says, as Serbian heroes.<sup>142</sup> She does not analyse the film narrative or film language to get these answers and therefore she overlooks the important elements in the film that are of key importance for her broader discussion on the lack

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142 See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 143-147.



of political criticism in the films, stereotypical representation of the war in Serbian films, and stereotypical representation of the Balkans and its people. As I noted earlier the stereotypes, which were discussed by Bjelic and also by other scholars that will be mentioned later in this text, can have a subversive function. Stereotypes in this sense are not investigated in Iordanova's study, but are an important element of her discussion on "the other Europe", the Balkans itself which adopted the Western gaze in its self representation.<sup>143</sup> This problem will not be discussed in detail in this thesis. Rather the issue of stereotypes and their function is integrated into my film analysis. Apart from the rich material and contextual analysis of Serbian cinema, Iordanova's work did not provide detailed analysis of the films themselves, an analysis that would focus more upon the film text and iconography equally, rather than emphasizing only the context. This approach would provide more of an insight into the ideological problems of Serbian society and its cinematic representation. The fact that critics were divided in reading the films, shows that both cases could prove to be correct, that the films did show ideologies critically but that also the film narrative was shaped by the ideological frame of the society. My intention is precisely to fill the gap in this existing analysis of Serbian film that Iordanova provided in her study, which I use as a form of a framework of my study. I intend to deconstruct what exactly "Serbian perspective"<sup>144</sup> means by analysing the representation of national and religious ideology in the selected films, and then to discuss its possible political subversiveness.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter I surveyed the studies from a wide range of literature that was pertinent to my research. Since this is an interdisciplinary study my resources were from different fields but nonetheless of equal importance for the purpose of this thesis. In the first part of this chapter I reviewed the field of film and religion in which I position this study. From the rich body of literature I further focused on those works which informed my research. My aim was to consider how these diverse

<sup>143</sup> See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p.143-147.

<sup>144</sup> See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p.143-147.

discussions enriched my study and at the same time to suggest how this thesis contributes to the field.

In this study I am applying a cultural studies approach, which combines the analysis of text and context, film narrative and images and symbols. My analysis of the films which is combined with the analysis of the socio-political context of the 1990s, can be also considered as an approach to the film as a “social artefact.”<sup>145</sup> My study of films is more focused upon how film reflects certain socio-political contexts and how films transmitted a specific ideological premise of that context. In this sense, I look at how Serbian films construct or subvert these ideological contexts.<sup>146</sup> I analyse specific films which “fit the final aim of the project.”<sup>147</sup> In this study I thereby further develop the “multi-dimensional” approach that Wright proposed. The field of film and religion in general lacks studies which focus on Eastern European, Balkan and Serbian cinema. None of the scholars have yet looked at how the films from this area inform us about religion and national identity, how the cinema communicates its cultural and socio-political contexts and whether these cinematic representations are critical and subversive. With this thesis I aim to bridge this gap.

Besides the literature in the film and religion field in this chapter I reviewed literature on the socio-political background. Besides the studies on Yugoslavia's downfall and the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, a useful source for my exploration on ideology were theologians and Church leaders whose work represents a vivid example of nationalist-religious ideology formed within the Church. Among the literature surveyed I have not found any systematic study on this issue, which certainly deserves more attention. This thesis partially fills this gap and proposes further investigation on nationalist-religious ideology in the Serbian contemporary context.

In this chapter I also surveyed literature on Serbian cinema. Among the rich body of

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145 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 30.

146 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 30.

147 Wright, Melanie: *Ibid*, p. 19.

studies which dealt with different aspects of the films and brought up important questions I framed and summarized the most important ones for the purpose of this thesis. The work of scholars such as Dina Iordanova were a foundation of my research and helped me in identifying the most important issues and thus understanding the complexity of films and importance of considering the production, for example, in reading the films. Iordanova's approach based on contextual analysis aims to discuss the political connotation of Serbian films of the 1990s. Although her study was useful and inspiring to my research, I find that this approach is not sufficient for the exploration of the political nature of Serbian films. By looking at the film text, context and the visual representation of the nationalist-religious ideology I further develop the research in this area.

Among all the works that I discussed in this chapter I found a lack of analysis of cinematic representation of nationalist-religious ideology, and religious images and national symbols that are embedded in the film text and which were frequently overlooked. In this sense this thesis is contributing to film studies on Serbian cinema. I demonstrate that this approach can shed light on many issues that these scholars raised, from those on stereotypes, on Jameson's wild man of the Balkans to the one that Iordanova identified as “resistance to togetherness” that “has become an essential part of the concept of balkanisation.”<sup>148</sup> This resistance of togetherness, as I demonstrate in this study, is rooted in the problem of the specific ideology employed by the specific political structures.

To sum up, by applying a cultural studies approach I extend the ways of reading and understanding Serbian films and their context, which can contribute to further understandings of the nationalist-religious ideology and its impacts. By looking at the cinematic representation of the nationalist-religious ideology in Serbian films of the 1990s, I extend the existing analysis, and I discuss this issue for the first time, in the field of film and religion, but also in the area of film studies in general. Before I turn to the analysis of the films, in the next chapter I first discuss the socio-political

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<sup>148</sup> Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 8.

context of the 1990s, which is important for the further discussion of Serbian cinema of the 1990s.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Socio-Political Context of the Milosevic Regime**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter is devoted to a discussion of the socio-political background in Serbia from the 1980s to the 1990s which is the time when a new national ideology appeared. The aim of this chapter is to explain the socio-political context in which the selected films of my case study were made. Serbian films depicted the socio-political context of Serbia, and portrayed the impact and consequences that the political ideology of the Milosevic regime had on the Serbian society, such as the escalation of the civil war, the change in the ideological discourse, and the growth of violence and crime in society. Many problems that I describe in this chapter were represented in the films, and critical observation offers an insight into the social, economic and political collapse of one society trapped in a political ideology that lasted for more than a decade. This brought nothing more than destruction of previously known norms and values. My aim is not to identify the causes of the civil war, which would be not just an over - ambitious goal but would provide a rather simplistic view on Yugoslavia's disintegration. I look rather at the role that nationalist-religious ideology had in promoting the Milosevic political ideas, as well as the impacts that this new ideological discourse had on Serbian society in general.

I identify the main characteristics of the ideological discourse promoted in Serbia through selected socio-political events. The growing wave of Serbian nationalism in the late 1980s was enforced and exploited by Slobodan Milosevic, who at this time centralized his power and established his leadership. In the first section I look at the

period of the 1980s directly connected to the rise to power of Slobodan Milosevic. Slobodan Milosevic was elected president of the Belgrade League of Communists City Committee in 1984. In 1986 he became president of the Central Committee of the Serbian League of Communists and in 1989 the first president of the Republic of Serbia. This is also the period of the formation of the political ideology embodied in nationalism, which characterized Milosevic's politics throughout the 1990s. Serbia embraced a new national ideology promoted by Milosevic's political apparatus, and which was an introduction to the break-up of Yugoslavia and the civil war. The main premises on which Yugoslavia was established, such as the one of brotherhood and unity, were undermined by the rise of nationalism.<sup>1</sup> To provoke national tensions in Yugoslavia, atrocities from the Second World War were brought back into view, which had previously been a forbidden theme and aggression was not so difficult to incite. As Igor Krstic argues:

When Tito died and European Communism fell, Serbian and Croatian nationalist narratives started to emerge, drawing strength from those memories that were pushed aside but not forgotten. Like individuals, nations must confront and understand past traumatic events before they can leave them behind and live normally. Too often, the ways of remembering traumatic memories of war have helped propagate historical cycles of violence instead of countering them.<sup>2</sup>

Since I am looking at the function and role of the nationalist-religious ideology in the Milosevic regime, including its impact and consequences, in the first section I discuss the very beginnings of the contemporary Serbian nationalism and its promotion in public discourse for the purposes of the regime, which contributed to the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the escalation of the war. Here I provide some

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<sup>1</sup> Yugoslavia, established in 1918 as a Kingdom, collapsed in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yugoslavia as the socialist country ruled by president Josip Brzo Tito was one of the founders of the non-aligned movement. The country consisted from several ethnic and religious groups. With the collapse of communism the Yugoslav ideal of brotherhood and unity was abandoned. In Serbia it was replaced with the new nationalist ideology which successfully imposed stereotypes of Serbs as Orthodox, Croats as Catholics and Bosnians as Muslims, a traditional and historical division that could not be overcome.

<sup>2</sup> Krstic, Igor: Re-thinking Serbia: *A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture*, <http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/krstic/>

information on this period in the mid 1980s and the institutions involved in the creation of a nationalist discourse for example, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

I look at the role of the religious and mythological discourse in the new political ideology, with particular emphasis on the most misused cultural myth, the *Kosovo Myth*. I discuss the main ideas of the *Kosovo Myth*, which represented a blend of nationalist and religious ideology. Important elements of the ideological discourse were national-religious myths, whose role and impact are a part of my analysis of nationalist-religious ideology as a political ideology of the regime. I discuss how the Serbian Orthodox Church adopted similar mythological language in its public discourse and how the Church positioned herself regarding the so-called Serbian national question. I provide some information on the celebration, in 1989, of the six hundred years of the Kosovo battle as the event that united for the first time in the recent history, the Church and the state. A part of this chapter is devoted to an explanation of the development of the nationalist-religious ideology within the Church. I discuss *Svetosavlje* ideology<sup>3</sup>, and its importance for determining national goals. Here I rely mostly on the definitions provided by the 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Nikolai Velimirovic. In the second part I discuss how the ideas of *Svetosavlje* were reinterpreted in the 1990s by the Church leaders. The aim of this section is to demonstrate the close bond between religious institutions and the role the Church had in raising the nationalist awareness of the Serbs, which was used for the political purposes of the regime.

The politics of the 1980s was characterised by the awakening of Serbian national identity and was imposed by the new Serbian elite which consisted of politicians, academics, writers and the church leaders. The discussions about the historical past of Serbia, its religious and cultural heritage that was seen as suppressed in Yugoslavia, drastically increased in the media in parallel with the increase of a type of national hysteria. The idea of expansion of Serbian territories to the areas where

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<sup>3</sup> *Svetosavlje* refers to a specific form of the Serbian Orthodoxy, and is based on the work of Saint Sava.

Serbs lived was represented first as a fight for the maintenance of Yugoslavia but later with the escalation of the Yugoslav civil war, as a national programme.<sup>4</sup> As in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Serbian national programme became a major theme in Serbian society. This issue was widely exploited in the media. With the break-up of Yugoslavia and the beginning of the conflict in the 1990s, nationalist-religious ideology was continuously promoted both by the regime's and the church's representatives.

I consider the impacts and consequences of the regime's ideology on the media and Serbian society. A brief discussion on the mediascape in Serbia gives an insight into how nationalism and religion were propagated in a populist manner. Populism in the media was characteristic of the increase of a pseudo-historical content, both religious and superstitious, all wrapped together in the discourse of local-patriotism. The criminals whose lifestyle was often promoted by the media, were represented as Serbian patriots. In this way the criminalization of Serbian society was completed and justified under the umbrella of the ruling ideology. In the conclusion, I explain the importance of this chapter for the following analysis of the selected films.

### **3.1. People against Liberals**

In this section I briefly draw attention to the two dominant political ideas that seem to have overshadowed different political systems of former Yugoslavia and Serbia.

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4 The idea of all Serbs in one state or in other words greater Serbia existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the time when Serbs were struggling for liberation from the Ottoman Empire. The document which outlines the aims of the Serbian national state was named *Nacertanije* and written by Ilija Garasanin (Outline, 1844). In this document he proposed "the expansion of Serbian territories to all areas in which Serbs lived." Bennet, Christopher: *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, London: Hurst & Company, 1996, p. 22.

Although this document should be observed and understood in the historical context of its time, some scholars drew parallels to the political situation of the 1980s. A reference to medieval Serbia and the glorious past common for the 19<sup>th</sup> century, aimed to lift the spirits of Serbs in the occupied territories, was also applied in the 1980s in the new political context, with the aim of completing homogenization of Serbs for the political purposes of the regime. Also the 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of the unification of all Serbs was now renewed in the concept of a Greater Serbia. Greater Serbia was a demand for independence of the Serbian areas in Croatia and Bosnia and their possible integration into the republic of Serbia. Some argued that both concepts were taken from Garasanin, while others historians such as Milan St. Protic considered it as a consequence of Serbo-communism. The process of homogenization required first the promotion of the idea of Greater Serbia.

These two ideas are commonly expressed as so called pro-liberal and people's ideology. My intention is not to provide in depth political analysis of these ideologies but rather to point out the basics of the concept of the prevailing people's ideology. This is for two reasons. First, I believe that this discussion can shed light on some of the crucial problems of Serbian society at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the first place the emergence of the nationalist-religious ideology which happened after the collapse of socialism and that is a matter of further discussion in this chapter. Second, this additionally helps the reading of the films, such as *Premeditated Murder*,<sup>5</sup> which paints these ideological conflicts within the Serbian society.

With no intention to over simplify this issue I briefly outline what the concept of the people's option meant in the historical and cultural context of Serbia at different periods of time. Serbia was a patriarchal society and the first attempts to create a modern state, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> but also throughout the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were characterized by “the conflict between patriarchalism and modernity.”<sup>6</sup> The Church contributed to this process by supporting the concept of patriarchalism, and of the strong nation state based on its historical heritage, the so-called ideals of *Svetosavlje* and the *Kosovo Myth*, ideologies which will be discussed later in this chapter. These ideals, according to the Church, shaped a specific ethos of the Serbian nation to which Serbs should return rather than embrace the principles of the modern European state, which was in local terminology also named the Western concept. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by the conflict between the liberal and patriarchal stream, through “the conflict of *Slavophiles* (Socialists and Radicals) with *Westerners* (Liberals).”<sup>7</sup> According to Latinka Perovic, the Radicals’ politics embodied the idea of the people’s state rather than the civilian state introducing traditional collectivism.<sup>8</sup> Serbia kept its traditionalist view of “political monism as an expression of a homogenous peasant society, inseparability of the Church and the state, the military influence on politics, elements which were integrated into the new

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5 This film will be discussed in chapter 4.

6 See Perovic, Latinka: *Izmedju anarhije i autokratije: srpsko drustvo na prelazima vekova (XIX-XXI)*, Beograd: Helsinski odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Ogledi Br. 8, 2006, p. 71.

7 Perovic, Latinka: *Ibid*, p. 21.

8 Perovic, Latinka: *Ibid*, p. 43-44.



Yugoslavian state.”<sup>9</sup>

The introduction of communism with the establishment of Tito's Yugoslavia, brought out another form of collectivism embodied in communism, diametrically opposed to the concept of Western capitalist individualism. Communism represented the so-called people's option, and successfully carried out the ideal of collectivism. This susceptibility came as a result of the influence of Orthodox faith, as Berdyaev argued:

Individualism is foreign to Orthodoxy, to it belongs a particular collectivism...but the authentic freedom of religious conscience, freedom of the spirit, is made evident not in an isolated autonomous personality, self-asserted in individualism but in a personality conscious of being in a super personal spiritual unity, in a unity with a spiritual organism, within the Body of Christ, i.e. the Church.<sup>10</sup>

In the same fashion, and similarly to politicians of the so called people's option<sup>11</sup> of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Serbian theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century argued against the *individualism* (my italics) of Western society, claiming that Orthodoxy had an important role in Serbian society that should not be neglected, as this would mean separation from Serbian tradition, culture and identity. This tradition, in the opinion of the Church, should be integrated into the socio-political life in a way distinct from Western democracies, which are more anthropocentric.<sup>12</sup> This idea, supported equally by the Church and some political parties, remained as one of the political concepts that lived the longest political life in Serbia. Despite changing political parties, it survived in its basics, constantly opposed to what is known as the concept of the

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<sup>9</sup> Perovic, Latinka: *Ibid*, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Berdyaev, Nikolai: *The Truth of Orthodoxy*, <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Sui-Generis/Berdyaev/essays/orthodox.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Latinka Perovic wrote about narodnjacka opcija, people's option as a political concept. For details see Perovic, Latinka: *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> “There is less of Trinitarian expression in Western Christianity, it is more Christocentric and anthropocentric. This difference is noted in Eastern and Western patristic, where the first theologises from the Divine Trinity and the second, from the human soul.” See Berdayev: *Ibid*.

modern Western state. This political form survived many turbulent events and systems in Serbia and returned in a new form in the 1990s. In the socio-political context of the 1990s it was conceptualized through the idea of a people's national state in which this new national, so-called people's spirit finds its expression in national hegemony. Some of the basic postulates of this people's option were reintroduced in the 1990s, when the Church proposed the above-mentioned ideas, such as unity of the church and state, based on the concept of *Svetosavlje* ideology. At the same time politicians embraced the return to 19<sup>th</sup> century collectivism and adopted the populist discourse of the people's option. A reinforced people's option was fully developed by former communists and by Milosevic's apparatus, to become a new form of expression of the modern Serbian nationalism. The main concept of this idea can be found in the nationalist-religious ideology of the 1990s, as a new form of 'people's option' at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Liberals in this context represented all Milosevic's ideological opponents in Serbia, who were struggling at the same time against the regime and for the concept of the modern, democratic state based on the Western European model.<sup>13</sup> In the next sections I discuss in more detail the period of formation of the political ideology of the 1990s, its main characteristics, and the events that determined the socio-political future of Serbia.

### **3.2. The Rise of Serbian Nationalism**

“Mother Nation:

I revoke your right to bear first names, the right to a surname and a family tree. All as one, all unanimously, at once, in the blink of an eye, because they have been chosen; because they wish to ascend, the whole nation as one notion, one craft, one space station. I revoke the verb “want” and I urge you to “have to”! I order everyone to share the same destiny, and to be uniform, I order the women to grow beards, the men to grow hair, order everyone to

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<sup>13</sup> The ideological opponents of Milosevic should not be confused with his political rivals. Political rivals, such as Vojislav Kostunica, leader of Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) for example was opposing Milosevic's politics but ideologically supported this people's option helping nationalist-religious ideology to survive even after Milosevic's downfall in 2000.

look alike, I'm endorsing collective facial surgery, cancelling unique fingerprints, and forbidding the brain from functioning as an independent organ; forbidding diversity in blood pressures and mentalities! I demand from all people to breathe in at the same time, and breathe out when I say so, no differences will be tolerated!

I introduce death as a historical obligation and life as a matter of choice, completely, definitely and irrevocably: I REVOKE!"<sup>14</sup>

Biljana Srbljanovic, *Pad (The Fall)*, 1999)

Political tensions in Yugoslavia increased in 1987. After the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Serbia it was clear that Slobodan Milosevic directed a new political discourse. Milosevic discredited his political rivals and took over the political apparatus and the media which, from this time, he held firmly for more than a decade.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, in the years to come, Slobodan Milosevic for some Serbian analysts represented not so much a nationalist as a ruthlessly ambitious person prepared to use any possible ideological concept to gain and save his power.<sup>16</sup>

Milosevic's politics, embodied in nationalistic discourse, were presented to the public as a fight to maintain Yugoslavia. The nationalistic rhetoric, also recognized as *populism* (my italics), was based on re-interpretation of Serbian and Yugoslav history, glorification of the Serbian nation through the revival of national mythology, and on an introduction of pseudo-historical facts, which included a so-called "hate

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14 Biljana Srbljanovic: *Pad (The Fall)*, 1999), <http://pescanik.net/content/view/860/129/>; Last accessed: 1/01/2009. My translation.

15 Among the first political rivals that Milosevic discredited were Ivan Stambolic, Dragisa Pavlovic and federal prime-minister Ante Markovic. Ivan Stambolic (Serbian president from 1986 to 1987) was a mentor of Milosevic but became his opponent. He was assassinated in 2000 by the Special Operation Unit of the Milosevic regime, which also assassinated Serbian Prime-minister Zoran Djindjic (2003). Dragisa Pavlovic, for example, opposed Milosevic's politics regarding Kosovo and he was expelled in 1987. See Traynor, Ian: *Ivan Stambolic*, [www.guardian.co.uk/serbia/article/0,,926742,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/serbia/article/0,,926742,00.html); [http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/serbian\\_digest/258/t258-1.htm](http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/serbian_digest/258/t258-1.htm); <http://www.b92.net/specijal/stambolic/>, Also Bennet, Christopher: *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, London: Hurst & Company, 1996, p. 90-96.

16 Bennet, Christopher: *Ibid*, p. 83.

speech”, an exclusive language against other nationalities of former Yugoslavia. The first document that introduced the public to this new national ideology was a *Memorandum* of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The fact that institutions like this were involved in this political process shows that Milosevic had the support of academics and intellectuals in Serbia. One of the most important remained Dobrica Cosic, academic and writer with a communist past, who is recognized as a 'father' of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s. Dobrica Cosic was also president of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts at the time when this institution actively participated in the creation of a new political consciousness aligned with Milosevic's political programme and when the *Memorandum* was written.

In the *Memorandum*, published in 1986, for the first time after the Second World War, the position of the Serbian nation in Yugoslavia was discussed. Recent Yugoslav history was reinterpreted and presented as unjust to Serbs. For example, Tito's Yugoslavia was seen as an anti-Serb state in which Serbian national identity was continuously suppressed.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Serbs were recognized as the most suffering nation in Yugoslavia, from World War II to the latest events.<sup>18</sup> Ongoing problems in Kosovo were also marked as “genocide” of the Serbian population. The Kosovo problem that appeared in the 1980s was widely discussed by the Serbian politicians, academics and Church representatives, and represented the turning point in Milosevic's career. The Albanian population, which acquired more independence within Yugoslavia, was labeled as separatist. Problems that were arising throughout the 1980s, including the migration of Kosovo Serbs from this province to other parts of Serbia, were characterized as an “exodus”, although some analysts considered this

17 See the whole text of *Memorandum*:

<http://www.haverford.edu/relg/sells/reports/memorandumSANU.htm>. Last accessed: 10/10/2008.

18 “In less than fifty years, over two successive generations, the Serbian nation has been exposed to such severe trials: twice exposed to physical extermination, to forced assimilation, to religious conversion, to cultural genocide, to ideological indoctrination, and to the denigration and renunciation of their own traditions beneath an imposed guilt complex, and thereby disarmed intellectually and politically, that they could not but leave deep spiritual wounds that cannot be ignored as this century of the great technological takeoff draws to a close...No other literary and artistic heritage is so disordered, ravaged, and confused as the Serbian heritage. The political criteria of the ruling ideology are imposed on Serbian culture as being more valuable and stronger than scientific or historical criteria.” <http://www.haverford.edu/relg/sells/reports/memorandumSANU.htm>

as an “economic migration”.<sup>19</sup> Socio-political circumstances in Yugoslavia after Tito's death and the Kosovo crisis were used by the authors of the *Memorandum* for introducing the Serbian national programme and a demand for the solution of the Serbian national question.<sup>20</sup> “The *Memorandum* also proposed rationalization of the political system and the opening of a political crisis.”<sup>21</sup>

The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts was one of the institutions that supported the process of the mythologization of the nation, a process justified by the *Kosovo Myth*, one of the major nationalist-religious myths of Serbs. Its reinterpretation in the late 1980s provided a new perception of the historical vocation of the Serbian nation supporting the official political stance.

### **3.3. The use of the *Kosovo Myth* in the Formation of the Political Ideology**

Nationalism was strongly connected to the Orthodox religion. National identity has strong bonds with religious identity and therefore the nationalist discourse in Serbia was inseparable from religiosity. Serbian Orthodoxy was suitable for the political purposes of the regime: in the first place it offered a new sense of identity instead of brotherhood and fraternity. We may say that in the late 1980s national ideology replaced the previous communist one. Religiousness was politically included in the process of homogenization. In fact it was a precondition for this process as “Serbian nationalism was grounded in religious mythology and symbolism.”<sup>22</sup> The national myths most exploited for political purposes were the *Kosovo Myth* and the ideology of St Sava called *Svetosavlje*.

The *Kosovo Myth* was strongly present in the public discourse, especially in the late

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19 Bennet, Christopher: *Ibid*, p. 93.

20 The politicians and Serbian intelligentsia frequently repeated this phrase in the media. The Serbian national question pertains mainly to the question of Serbian territories but also to national identity, culture, religious identity, territories and political attitude towards pro-Western ideas.

21 Milosavljevic, Olivera: “Zloupotreba autoriteta nauke” in Popov, Nebojsa (ed.): *Srpska strana rata*, Beograd: BIGZ, 1996, p. 313-314.

22 Duijzings, Ger: *Religion and the Politics of the Identity in Kosovo*, London: Hurst & Company, 2000. p. 177.

1980s. Already mentioned in relation to the Kosovo crisis, representation of Albanians in the media as separatists, and discussions of Serbian suffering foreran Milosevic's political actions such as replacement of the Albanian leaders with new appointees and a change of the Constitution. The new amendments opened a political crisis in Kosovo which resulted in demonstrations and bloodshed, but also in the establishment of Milosevic's power. The problems and actions in Kosovo province were justified by drawing parallels with the *Kosovo Myth*, or in other words they were represented as a fight for the renewal of Serbian integrity on this so-called sacred land, where historically Serbs had been exposed to suffering and persecution. There follows an outline of the main characteristics of the *Kosovo Myth* reinforced in the 1980s.

The myth is based on the epic reinterpretation of the historical event that occurred on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1389 on the Kosovo field (Kosovo polje). The battle between the Serbian army, headed by the Serbian Duke Lazar Hrebeljanovic, and the Ottoman army, headed by Sultan Murad, ended with the death of both leaders and, consequently, Serbia soon lost its independence. The battle was seen as a clash between two civilizations and religions, Christianity and Islam, and it remained one of the most famous battles preserved in Serbian national epics and culture. The tragedy in Kosovo and a legend of Duke Lazar are described in the epic song *The Fall of the Serbian Empire*, which became the basis for the *Kosovo Myth*. The main character, Lazar, is described as a Christ-like figure, while the events have a supernatural character. According to the legend, Lazar receives a glorious message from God, who confronts him with two possible choices, of the “kingdom of earth” and the “kingdom of heaven.” If he chooses the first one, he will win and if chooses the second one, he will die along with his whole army but will gain Christ’s kingdom. Before the battle Lazar has his last supper, where the tragedy to come is revealed by betrayal by one of his knights, Vuk Brankovic. Vuk Brankovic’s character represents Judas’ character. Lazar chooses the “kingdom of heaven”, which represents his acceptance of martyrdom for Christ.

This acceptance is the central moral message that an unknown storyteller emphasizes throughout the song. It suggests Christ-likeness as an ideal; and many theologians referred to Lazar's decision not as an individual act, but, rather, as an act that embodies the orientation of the Serbian nation towards Christ. The story depicts a strictly ethical, moral concept of the battle rather than dealing with concrete historical facts. Its central motif is the idea of Christian suffering and martyrdom for Christ. Before the battle Lazar calls all Serbs to come to Kosovo, and those who do not come will be cursed by the *Duke's curse* (*Knezeva kletva*).<sup>23</sup> The words that Lazar supposedly said on this occasion are engraved in the monument of *Gazimestan* where the battle took place. The words of *Knezeva kletva* were used in the 1980s as a form of political message which was a call to the new national battle for Kosovo, through which Serbs will regain their lost national integrity. In this way, the battle of Kosovo is moved into the "extra-temporal conflict that stands outside the sphere of politics, economics and history."<sup>24</sup>

Just war, in the context of the *Kosovo Myth*, is understood as a defensive war. The definition of a just war according to the *Kosovo Myth* was successfully transferred to politics in the 1980s and 1990s, and the civil war was represented as a defensive war of Serbian territories and culture. The political use of the *Kosovo myth* created an illusion that the interests of warlords and political leaders were identical with the interests of the nation. The interests of the nation were defined by the same mythological language and by the premise that Serbs are a Christ-like nation which suffers for Christ and as such has a unique place and importance in human history. This is the reason why the phrase *Kosovo testament*<sup>25</sup> (my italics) appears as a popular reference to Lazar's decision. The *Kosovo testament* is interpreted as a covenant between God and the Serbs, which is analogous to the covenant between the Hebrews and God in the Old Testament. Within the Church, the Kosovo battle is perceived as it is in the epic song: Serbian defeat has mysterious, supernatural

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23 "Whoever does not fight at Kosovo, may he have no children born to him...may nothing give fruit that his hands sows, neither the white wheat, nor the red wine, his blight rot all his brood while it endures".

24 Duijzings, Ger: *Ibid*, p. 196.

25 In Serbian: Kosovski zavet. My translation.

reasons; It is a mystery that reveals the true meaning of the battle as an orientation towards Christ. The Serbian nation is perceived as the nation historically faced with the choice between the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of earth.”<sup>26</sup>

Suffering became a synonym for Serbian post-Kosovo history. The use of the *Kosovo Myth* resulted in the glorification of nationhood, emphasizing Serbia’s suffering and historical injustice, followed by a particularly misused phrase during the 1980s, “heavenly Serbia.”<sup>27</sup> The revival of the Kosovo myth represented a blend of nationalist and religious ideology which, as such, had the aim of determining Serbian political, cultural and spiritual life. Ethnicity and religiosity are equated through the image of Lazar. Lazar’s orientation towards the “kingdom of heaven” embodies both Serbian nationalist and religious ideas. In the 1990s both the Church and the state insisted on a martyr-like image of Serbs. The suffering of the Church and clergy during and after the Second World War was recognized as a continuous martyrdom and the suffering of the Serbian people was perceived as a Christ-like suffering. The idea of martyrdom has strong religious roots. However, Lazar's orientation towards the “kingdom of heaven” in the context of the 1990s was to legitimize the civil war as the just battle for revenge over Kosovo and other so-called historical injustices committed against Serbs.

### **3.4. The Church and the National Question**

Representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church adopted this mythological language in their public appeals in the 1980s. After fifty years of suppression, the Serbian Church returned into the public sphere regaining its social voice. During the 1980s the Church that was coming out of its marginalized position saw in this new situation a chance to restore the Church's integrity within society, from the restoration of its public voice to the negotiation of property issues. On the other hand, the Serbian Church was historically always closely connected to the state. The connection of

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26 See: Velimirovic, Nikolaj and Popovic, Justin: *The Mystery and Meaning of the Battle of Kosovo*, Illinois: The Free Serbian Orthodox Diocese of the United States and Canada, 1989.

27 This term was frequently used in Milosevic's media throughout the 1990s.



Orthodoxy to national identity and their preserving each other in times of crisis had an important impact not just on the perception of Christianity as such but also on theological thought in Serbia, characterized by the close link between religion and the nation. The adjective Serbian as a name in the Orthodox Church was introduced in 1920, which was a result of the long historical connection of the Church with nationhood.<sup>28</sup> The historical circumstances after the fall of Serbian lands under the Ottoman Empire and the hard position of Serbs caused the Serbian Church to embrace the role of a keeper of nationhood and its culture. “The *Serbian question*, became an element and form of religion.”<sup>29</sup> This brought Serbian Orthodoxy close to the problem of *εθνοφιλία*<sup>30</sup> but also influenced Orthodoxy in the late 1980s causing it to receive more of a shape of religious ideology, which may be observed as a consequence of the above mentioned historical experience of the Serbian Church and a tradition of participation in the national struggles for liberation and preservation of cultural identity.<sup>31</sup>

New political attitudes towards the Church in the 1980s overlapped with growing nationalism in the public sphere, and this overlapping is one of the pointers to the way in which the politics of Serbia started changing drastically as compared with the previous, communist period. The Church at the same time becomes more concerned with the Serbian national question and consequently, later on, with the question of territorialism. From 1984, for example, genocide became a theme in the Church press, especially after the mass graves of the Serbian victims from World War II were opened. The opening of these mass graves was politically manipulated, to remind Serbs of their historical suffering, especially those who lived on the territories of Croatia and Bosnia. In the media, both Milosevic's and the Church press, Serbs were portrayed as a heroic nation who suffered at the hands of fascists and

28 Paraphrased. See Radic, Radmila: “Crkva i srpsko pitanje” in Popov, Nebojsa: *Srpska strana rata*, Beograd: Bigz, 1996, p. 268.

29 Perovic, Latinka: *Ibid*, p. 24. My translation.

30 The Greek word which can be translated as ethnofiletism. It is used to mark a heresy when the Church puts the nation above Christ.

31 The Serbian Orthodox Church was a kind of a substitute for the state in times of crisis. For example, during the Ottoman Empire Church leaders often participated in the struggles for liberation. Petar I Petrovic Njegos (1747-1830) who was bishop of the Orthodox Church and the ruler of Montenegro, began a liberation war and defeated the Ottoman army in 1796 in the battle of Krusi.

communists more than any other nation of former Yugoslavia, as was also expressed in the *Memorandum* mentioned earlier. Suffering is strongly emphasized. Reinterpretation of history, growing nationalism after the period of communism, sudden clericalisation of society, all resulted in the sacralization of the nation, based on a populist interpretation of history and religion. In this way a nationalist-religious ideology was formed in the public discourse, and was mainly used to support and justify political actions of the Milosevic regime. The contribution of the Church to this process in the 1980s was needed too, and this is probably one of the reasons why Milosevic's populists exploited religion to this extent.

On the other hand the Church press also expressed its concern for the position of the Serbian nation, and published a number of articles in its official newspaper *Pravoslavlje* on the themes of genocide, the *Kosovo Myth* and the importance of the restoration of national and religious identity among Serbs. Representatives of the Serbian Church started to create public petitions about the Kosovo crisis. An appeal, signed by three of the most eminent theologians (later bishops), strongly demanded protection of Serbs and Serbian culture in Kosovo.<sup>32</sup> “In 1983, *Pravoslavlje* published selections from the book by the bishop Atanasije Jevtic *Od Kosova do Jadovna (From Kosovo to Jadovno)*, which listed the sufferings of Serbs from the Second World War to the current Kosovo crisis.”<sup>33</sup> Many others who published texts aimed to explain a mystical meaning of the *Kosovo Myth* for Serbs, and its importance for preserving Serbian identity and a specific Christian ethos. In one such article Kosovo is described not just as a territory but as a “metaphysical creation...on a higher existential level.”<sup>34</sup> “In 1987, the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church for the first time used the term genocide to describe the position of Serbs in Kosovo.”<sup>35</sup> The arguments of the Serbian Orthodox Church had strong connotations similar to those of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts seen in the *Memorandum*: Serbs were perceived as victims of the Yugoslav state and as a nation

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32 “Twenty one priests and Bishops Atanasije Jevtic, Irinej Bulovic and Amfilohije Radovic signed this appeal.” See Radic, Radmila: *Ibid*, p. 269-270.

33 Radic, Radmila: *Ibid*, p. 271.

34 Radic, Radmila: *Ibid*, p. 271.

35 Radic, Radmila: *Ibid*, p. 271.

that had been exposed to cultural, social and spiritual suppression and discrimination, including genocide.

### **3.5. The Celebration of the Kosovo Battle and the Cooperation between the Church and the State in the Creation of Political Ideology**

How the two ideologies found the same path was evident in the celebration of the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kosovo battle in 1989. The Serbian Church took an active part in preparations for the celebration. As a part of these preparations during 1988 the relics of St Lazar of Kosovo were carried throughout Serbia. On this occasion, “Bishop Jovan introduced the phrase “heavenly Serbia” in the context of the suffering of the Orthodox Serbs from the Kosovo battle till the present day.”<sup>36</sup> This term was later exploited both by the politicians and the Church throughout the 1990s. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, just four days before the celebration, *Politika* newspapers, at this time already in hands of the regime, published the speech of future-bishop Atanasije Jevtic, which was delivered in the Gracanica monastery on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June in front of the relics of Prince Lazar. This speech reflected not just an ecclesiastical greeting to the martyr but also many of the attitudes of the church that were in accordance with official politics. The strong emphasis is on the martyrdom of the Serbian people, but it also provides good news of the national renewal after a period of suffering and persecution. Bishop Atanasije greeted Prince Lazar with the following words, which recall a possible answer to the aforementioned *Knezeva kletva* (Duke's curse) and certainly signify a new age in Serbian socio-political life:

You have come to us now when we are upright again...Thank God and you, now we are on the right way not to revenge but to protect our honour; Tt protect not just the Constitution but the noble position of Serbia...we promise you here in Kosovo, in Gracanica, today and tomorrow on the field of the battle in Gazimestan, that we will answer your call – to fight, continuing the Battle of Kosovo: for the return of the lost, for the resurrection of the

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36 Radic, Radmila: *Ibid*, p. 278.

insensible, for the rise of the overturned, for the restoration of the destroyed.<sup>37</sup>

The Kosovo event in 1989, the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kosovo battle, represented the beginning of a new era in the relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state, as this was the first time that Church representatives and political leaders appeared together, unified in the first public broadcasting of the Liturgy. This unity was based on “Serbian national interests.”<sup>38</sup> The Kosovo celebration was recognized by the official media as the biggest gathering of Serbs in the century, and represented a visual introduction into a decade of civil wars and destruction of the country. This event had tremendous political and ideological importance for the victory of pro-nationalist forces and at the same time for the introduction of the Church into the political scene of Serbia. It had a symbolic meaning as the awakening of Serbs after half of a century under communism where their national identity was perceived to have been suppressed. The nation elected a new leader, Milosevic, who established his power in Serbia and over the primary Serbian media centres. The hate speech that emerged at this time against other nations of Yugoslavia, spread by the state media through the populist discourse, was a call to arms. Milosevic’s appearance at the celebration of the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kosovo battle, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1989, turned into political triumph, and was probably the highest point of Milosevic’s popularity among Serbs. On this occasion Milosevic stated: “After many centuries we stand again before the battles which are not armed, although armed battles are still not excluded.”<sup>39</sup>

The Church neglected Milosevic’s communist orientation and embraced the offer of public space. The extent to which the whole Church supported the idea of a greater Serbia is arguable, but certainly her leaders, with their participation in the war issues, contributed to the image that the state and the Church had a tendency towards the

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37 Jevtic, Atanasije: *Pred mostima Kneza Lazara u Gracanici*, *Politika*, 24.6.1989, p.12.

38 The most common attitude of the Serbian elite is probably best reflected in the words of Slobodan Milosevic: “In this Europe we will enter not as lackeys who ridicule their own state and its institutions...but we will enter this Europe as equals and in our own socialist way”. *Politika*, 24.05.1989 Quoted in Perovic, Latinka: *Ibid*, p. 41.

39 Tanjug vest: Gazi Mestan, 28. jun 1989, *Politika*, 29.6.1989, p. 8.

same ideal of the nation-state, and the same political goals. The cult of the nation prevailed in the Serbian theological notion that to be Orthodox meant to be a Serb and vice versa. Similarly to the intellectuals of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, some Church representatives saw Yugoslavia as a grave of Serbian national interests.

### **3.6. Development of the Religious-Nationalist Ideology within the Church**

Religiousness represented one of the essential elements of the nationalist ideology, and this is the reason why I call the ideology of the 1980s and 1990s nationalist-religious ideology. Nevertheless from the 1980s, the relationship between Church and the state varied, sometimes resulting in open conflicts between the two, especially after Milosevic's political failure regarding Serbs in Krajina (Croatia) and Bosnia. Despite the existence of political misunderstandings on crucial questions, Church representatives supported the creation of a religious ideology within the Church and used a rhetoric based on national mythology in their communication with the public. For the Church leaders, the nation represented a religious category. For example, the term "heavenly nation" was promoted by the Church to associate Serbian nationhood with Orthodoxy. Such an attitude supported the conflict between modernity and patriarchalism, on which Latinka Perovic wrote, and the Church expressed a natural tendency towards patriarchal society. In this sense we may argue that the period from the 1990s represents re-traditionalization and clericalization of Serbian society.

#### **3.6.1. Historical Background, Religious Ideology expressed through *Svetosavlje***

From the perspective of Serbian Orthodoxy, this process was strongly based on *Svetosavlje* ideology, which bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic tried to define. *Svetosavlje*, expressing the ideological concept of the uniqueness of Serbian Orthodoxy, was intended to provide a strong basis for the foundation of the nation state and cultural values. The concept of nationalism embodied in this term, however, confronted the

Church and the popular perception of Orthodoxy with the aforementioned problem of ethnofiletism. Velimirovic's work, as well as the work of later Serbian theologians, reflected the conflict between the liberal view and the idea of a people's state.

The ideals of *Svetosavlje* in the ideological and pro-national context appeared in the 1930s. This term derives from the name of Saint Sava, the first Serbian Archbishop.<sup>40</sup> *Svetosavlje* is a synonym for Serbian Orthodoxy, a specific form of Orthodoxy, which does not have any liturgical or canonical differences from other Orthodox churches. It also preserved strong ideological connotations by representing political views on the organization of the state and its core values. The main ideological assumptions of *Svetosavlje* were presented for the first time in the work *Nationalism of St Sava* written by Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic.<sup>41</sup> His definition of *Svetosavlje* is directly connected with the idea of nationalism. Velimirovic here elaborated Serbian nationalism through the "St Sava nationalism."<sup>42</sup> Before Velimirovic nobody characterized St Sava's work by explicitly using this term. The St Sava nationalism certainly reflects the political aspirations of that time in Serbia, and Velimirovic's work should also be read in this context. One aim of Velimirovic's work, we may argue, was to provide a theological justification and to legitimize the national programme<sup>43</sup> based on the Orthodox heritage. Here Velimirovic expresses his faith in the religious-nationalist vocation of Serbia both in the Balkans and in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Apart from descriptions of the virtues of St Sava, it was recognized as the basis for personal and national enlightenment. Velimirovic defined St Sava nationalism, as "multiple and fruitful activity and the effort that St Sava expressed, as

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40 Rastko Nemanjic, St Sava, (1171-1236) was the son of the founder of the Nemanjic Dynasty, Stefan Nemanja (1109-1199). St Sava organized the Serbian Orthodox Church and became its first Archbishop in 1219. Sava also restored the abandoned monastery Hilandar on Mount Athos, which became the centre of Serbian Christian monastic life. St Sava is also considered the father of Serbian independent literature. His most important works are the *Kareya Typicon* and *Hilandar Typicon*, both guides for ascetic life, and *Nomokanon*, the first Serbian Law Codex. Serbian Orthodox Christians celebrate Sava as patron saint of education and medicine since the 1830. See Bogdanovic, Dimitrije: *Sveti Sava*, [http://www.rastko.org.yu/knjizevnost/liturgicka/svsava-sabrana/svsava-sabrana\\_01.html](http://www.rastko.org.yu/knjizevnost/liturgicka/svsava-sabrana/svsava-sabrana_01.html); Last accessed: 19/3/2007.

41 Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Nacionalizam Svetog Save*, [http://www.verujem.org/savremeni\\_teolozi\\_azbucni.htm](http://www.verujem.org/savremeni_teolozi_azbucni.htm)

42 Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Ibid.*

43 National programme is translation from Serbian and means political programme for one nation.

a real European, for his people.”<sup>44</sup> St Sava’s nationalism, according to Velimirovic, includes “the people’s national church, the people’s national dynasty, the people’s national culture, and the people’s defense.”<sup>45</sup>

To elaborate these ideas I discuss Velimirovic’s definitions. The first two reflect his belief in the Church as a liturgical organism which is in *συμφωνία*<sup>46</sup> with a dynasty of people who are bonded by the same blood, language, morals, customs, and faith.<sup>47</sup> “The people’s state” is perceived as a national state. The boundaries of that national state, interestingly, can spread to the areas where that same nation lives, while anything beyond these boundaries he classifies as an act of imperialism and alienation from St Sava’s ideal. This political claim escalated in the 1980s and 1990s, when the church on many occasions, re-introducing a specific form of *Svetosavlje* as its programme, repeated it in more direct ways. In that sense, if the boundaries of the national state spread to the territory where “the people” live, then Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia ought to unite under their country of origin, Serbia. This Serbian national question returned as a central political question for the Serbian Church in the 1990s.

Further, according to Velimirovic, national culture as an expression of “the people’s mind”, was shaped by St Sava’s work.<sup>48</sup> The main virtue of education Velimirovic finds in “restraint from the misuse of knowledge.”<sup>49</sup> The “misuse of knowledge” is a reference to contemporary Europe, as “Velimirovic believes that the West was alienated from Christ.”<sup>50</sup> This criticism of the West is evident in the work of other Serbian theologians of the 1990s which I briefly discuss later. “The People’s national defense” on the other hand he defines through the people’s army, based on a voluntarily principle of patriotic and moral obligations. The only aim of national

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44 Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Ibid.*

45 Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Ibid.*

46 Greek word that can be translated as symphony. Refers to the harmony and unity between the emperor and the church.

47 See Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Ibid.*

48 Translated from Serbian. The term “people’s mind” Velimirovic uses deliberately to suggest that the nation has a form of single, spiritual mind. See Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Ibid.*

49 Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Ibid.*

50 Nedeljkovic, Sasa: *Mit, religija i nacionalni identitet: Mitologizacija u Srbiji u periodu nacionalne krize*, <http://web.f.bg.ac.yu/download/33nedeljkovic,%20mitologizacija.pdf>, p.4.

defense is to protect its own people and national state, not to lead conquering wars nor to destroy other nations and countries. Although Velimirovic considers the use of the military only when all other political solutions are exhausted, this concept again found its echo in the 1990s. Not only does Velimirovic suggest the definition of a 'just war' but also he provides a basis for the later perception of the Yugoslav civil war as a war of protection of the Serbian people, their lands and culture.

These are the main ideas in which St Sava's nationalism is rooted according to Velimirovic. Velimirovic provided a theoretical model of a strong nation-state built on *Svetosavlje*. The basis and centre for St Sava's nationalism is the people's national church.<sup>51</sup> Velimirovic also defined this type of nationalism as "Evangelical nationalism."<sup>52</sup> He argues that this evangelical nationalism is not racist, but protects the nation from both imperialism and internationalism.<sup>53</sup> The nationalism elaborated in this work provided a solid ground for the expression of a new religious nationalism in the 1990s, enabling the union of national and religious ideology. At this time the work of Nikolaj Velimirovic which overlapped with the crisis in Yugoslavia and the beginning of the civil war, also was revived; Velimirovic's work became a basis for the understanding of *Svetosavlje* and in Church circles his ideas were frequently applied and reinterpreted as St Sava's original ideas.

### 3.6.2. Religious Ideology in the 1990s and the Reintroduction of *Svetosavlje*

The return to St Sava's ideals and the *Kosovo Myth* in the 1990s represented a politicization of religion. Politicization remained as one of the major problems throughout the 1990s. For example, in one of the books published by the Orthodox Metropolitan of Montenegro in 1996 called *The Philosophy of War*, a group of authors considers the question of war from a theological point of view and in order to justify the Yugoslav conflict.<sup>54</sup> This book embodies the main postulates on which the

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51 Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Ibid.*

52 Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Ibid.*

53 Paraphrased, see Vladika Nikolaj Velimirovic: *Ibid.*

54 One of the authors published in the book is Radovan Karadzic, currently a fugitive indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague.



religious ideology was based. The writers use phrases such as “heavenly orientation”, “self sacrifice”, “war as sacrifice for the most sacred”, “crucifixion of the nation”, and “false peace and defensive war.”<sup>55</sup> Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic are at the same time recognized as mythical heroes.<sup>56</sup> The civil war is here perceived as a “defensive war” that Serbs waged for the protection of their sacred lands and identity, while the intervention of the West in the Yugoslav conflict is seen “on the geopolitical plan, as the war that post-Christian civilizations headed by the United States (piedmont of the new Western world), are leading against the vestiges of the Euro-Asian Christian civilization.”<sup>57</sup> In this context, the role of the Serbian people is to defend their Christian national heritage, not just from the communists, who started the civil war, in Jevtic’s opinion, but also from the “new world order”, a populist slogan used equally by the state media and the Church representatives to describe the Western political attitude towards the Balkans. For example, Western Europe is often described as a single, undifferentiated region, which has abandoned Christ and has become a source of evil, turning humans into slaves of material things.<sup>58</sup> In populist language, the church leaders called democracy “demonocracy”<sup>59</sup> and “ironically compare it to Stalinism.”<sup>60</sup> The solution that they proposed was rejection of the Western concept of the democratic state and a return to St Sava’s ideal “that will help us to shape our own future.”<sup>61</sup>

According to some sociologists of religion in Serbia, the Church was continuously expressing her stance against secularization, introducing at the same time a

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55 See Group of Authors: *Jagnje Bozije i zvijer iz bezdana*, <http://www.mitropolija.cg.yu/duhovnost/jagnje/>

56 Zurovac, Mirko: “Sta nam se stvarno dogodilo ili “Prozvodnja lazi” u sluzbi militarnog imperijalizma” in Group of authors: *Ibid*.

57 Jevtic, Atanasije: “Najgori od svih mogucih ratova”, in Group of Authors: *Ibid*.

58 Perovic, Latinka: *Ibid*, p.40.

59 In the Church press and speeches of Church representatives ‘Western’ democracy was often called ‘demonocracy.’ “The lie was proclaimed as truth, demonocracy was proclaimed as democracy, tyranny was proclaimed as freedom.” Metropolitan Amfilohije: *Bolje nam je s Hristom pljuvan biti i krst njegov nositi*,

[http://mitropolija.cg.yu/dvavoda/besede/mit\\_bs-niksic\\_99\\_1.html](http://mitropolija.cg.yu/dvavoda/besede/mit_bs-niksic_99_1.html)

60 *Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva i novi srpski identitet*,

<http://www.helsinki.org.yu/doc/reports/srp/Studija-Kupres.pdf>, p. 5.

61 Metropolitan Amfilohije: *Ibid*, [http://www.mitropolija.cg.yu/duhovnost/m-amfilohije-prosvetno\\_predanje.html](http://www.mitropolija.cg.yu/duhovnost/m-amfilohije-prosvetno_predanje.html)

retrograde concept of the state that is not grounded in a multi-confessional or a multi-national society, but, rather, organized on the principle of “God-king-householder.”<sup>62</sup> This principle reflected how the Serbian Church was always more in favour of the idea of the people's state and against the liberal views. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a strong sense of resistance within the Church against “modernism” which was seen as the westernization of Serbia. Among many reasons, the strongest argument that leading theologians provided was that Serbia would lose its cultural identity in this process. They held that the Serbian national state should be established on ideals and principles based on Orthodox Christianity.

Territorial questions remained a concern of the Church: the borders of the republics of former Yugoslavia were seen as a communist division of territories, and as unjust towards these Serbs who lived in Croatia and Bosnia. This discourse certainly enabled, if not supported, the nationalistic claims of the Serbian elite, and was one of the rhetorical pillars of the Milosevic regime; Serbian wars were presented as “always defensive wars.”<sup>63</sup> The description of Milosevic as a traitor reflects again the claim that the Church remained as the one and only defender of nationhood, accusing Milosevic, not of actually causing the war, but of betraying Serbian national interests.<sup>64</sup>

*Svetosavlje* and the *Kosovo Testament* became a form of ecclesiastical-national programme and became an ideology of the leading Serbian theologians. In spite of their conflict with Milosevic, the Church leaders never abandoned the national programme of the unity of Serbs under the umbrella of Orthodoxy and the ideology of *Svetosavlje*.<sup>65</sup> The anti-western attitude also supported a sense of self-isolation and xenophobia, elements on which the Milosevic regime fed. The regime used the

62 See Milan Vukomanovic in *Zasto se u Crkvi sapuce*, Insajder, B92, 19. maj 2005. [http://www.b92.net/info/emisije/insajder.php?nav\\_id=167819&yyyy=2005&mm=05](http://www.b92.net/info/emisije/insajder.php?nav_id=167819&yyyy=2005&mm=05)

63 Jevtic, Atanasije: *Ibid*

64 “...this was a heroic war, at least in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. These people honorably sacrificed their lives, suffering at the hands of their neighbours and the NATO bombing...to be betrayed by a traitor, the biggest in our history, the president of Serbia, Milosevic, whose betrayal has not finished yet.” Jevtic, Atanasije: *Ibid*.

65 See Vukomanovic, Milan: *Ibid*, <http://www.helsinki.org.yu/doc/reports/eng/Studija-Vukomanovic-eng.pdf>

Church to secure its political legitimacy. The Church leaders, on the other hand, came into conflict with Milosevic at the time when it appeared to them that he had abandoned Serbian interests.<sup>66</sup> “The Serbian Orthodox Church did not treat the ‘national question’ as a separate political problem but as a form and element of religion, which therefore represented national and not just religious institutions.”<sup>67</sup> The impact of the frequent use of mythological language in the public discourse, promoted equally by the church leaders, media, academics and politicians, created an illusion of close bonds between the present and the past.<sup>68</sup>

The so-called glorious past was used to give meaning and explanation to Serbian politics, and its ideological premise was that Serbs are “protectors of the most rare civilization values” and against the “modern materialism” of the West.<sup>69</sup> Reinterpretation of national history and the use of the national myths were common among both the politicians and the Church leaders. Religion had an important role in this process. As Ivan Colovic argues, “national myths become cults”, “pre-military training” and therefore “suitable for war propaganda.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, we may conclude that from the 1980s, a specific form of nationalist-religious ideology was formed in the public discourse of Serbia. By supporting and participating in this ideological discourse, Serbian theologians estranged themselves from traditional teaching on unity in Christ, since the “ecclesiastical perception of a community of people is opposite to any ideology of domain and blood.”<sup>71</sup>

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66 See Radic, Radmila: *Ibid*, p. 295-296.

67 Radic, Radmila: *Ibid*, p. 302.

68 Paraphrased Colovic, Ivan: *Politika simbola*, Beograd: Fond za otvoreno drustvo, 2000, p. 11-12.

69 Colovic, Ivan: *Ibid*, p. 15.

70 Colovic, Ivan: *Ibid*, p. 109.

71 Peno, Zdravko: *Hriscansko rodoljublje po Svetom Apostolu Pavlu*, Beograd: Teoloski pogledi 1/03, 2003, p. 33.

### 3.7. Ideological Impacts on the Media and the Serbian Society

In the 1990s, this nationalist-religious concept became a folding screen for the nationalists whose political actions were justified as a continuous fight for Orthodoxy and Serbdom. In parallel with the rise of nationalism and the escalation of the war, in Serbian society organized crime and violence increased. Criminalization of society was completed through the legitimacy given to criminals, who became leaders of different paramilitary formations or worked for the state.<sup>72</sup> Apart from their participation in the battlefield, they were also famous for political murders ordered by the regime. Milosevic's State Security unit was connected to crime and was behind assassinations of the journalists of independent media.<sup>73</sup> Although Milosevic never officially banned independent media, their work was under continuous suppression, and they were marked as “domestic traitors” and “foreign solvents” by the regime's media.<sup>74</sup> The journalists of the independent media were under constant pressure or threats to their lives. The state media was at the same time continuing its political propaganda whose aim was indoctrination of its citizens. Nevertheless, the existence of the independent media was an excuse for the regime to support the picture of Serbia as a democratic state.

The economic sanctions and growing poverty caused by the galloping inflation in the 1990s was the time when tycoons appeared. In order to distract citizens from corruption and the crime, the regime transmitted reports from the battlefields. The regime's media were using the war to justify the total economic and moral collapse of the society. The nationalist-religious ideology was required to promote a politically

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72 For example, the paramilitary formation “Tigers” was headed by a criminal Zeljko Raznatovic Arkan. Arkan worked for the state and was closely bound to Milosevic's regime. He was also famous as a leader of fans of the football club “Red Star.” Fans of the “Red Star” were well known in the 1990s for their nationalism. Arkan was assassinated in 2000.

73 Among the journalists whose murders are still not solved are Slavko Curuvija, assassinated in 1999 and Dada Vujasinovic, assassinated in her flat in 1994.

74 One of the independent Serbian media that were under continuous attack by the regime was Belgrade located Studio B and B92. The first played an important role from the demonstrations of the opposition in 1991 until 1996, when it was taken under the regime's control. Studio B was liberated in 2000. B92, was first Radio station and later TV, played an important role throughout the 1990s. This station also had important roles in the October revolution in 2000 and in Milosevic's downfall. See Masic, Dusan: *Talasanje Srbije, knjiga o radiju B92*, Beograd: Samizdat, 2006, p. 460-479.

suitable image of the war and its warlords. The state media were silent about the war profiteers and focused on the ideal of a Serbian warrior as an honorable hero. Colovic discussed this concept as the myth of the Serbian warrior who has “manly courage” and “the soul of a maiden.”<sup>75</sup> Criminals were participating in TV shows which frequently presented ordinary people with ideals and values, but with slightly different paths in life.<sup>76</sup> The villains were often represented in the media as national heroes, glorified and compared to the Serbian generals from the First World War. A criminal life style was variously promoted and violence in the media became a part of every day life. “Television talk shows, films, the daily news, boulevard magazines and newspapers were flooded day in and day out with these spectacles of past and present public violence.”<sup>77</sup>

Entertainment programmes promoted the symbols of Milosevic's culture, a culture of isolation which had its own values and rules. Television Pink, one of the new TV stations established in the 1990s and mainly made for entertainment, was under the control of Milosevic's wife, Mirjana Markovic, whose political party was called Jugoslovenska Levica (Yugoslav Left). This TV station, nowadays a media giant in the Balkans, introduced turbo-folk music and false glamour in an economically and politically weakened Serbia. Folk-singers were often connected with criminals and criminal life styles.<sup>78</sup> TV Pink was dictating new values, and became a synonym for the Milosevic culture of the 1990s.

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75 See Colovic, Ivan: *Ibid*, p. 66-67.

76 The TV show *Crni Biseri* (*Black Pearls*) was one of the most popular shows on TV Politika in the 1990s. The journalist Vanja Bulic hosted many criminals, people with a 'suspicious past' and those connected with them.

77 Krstic, Igor: *Re-thinking Serbia: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture*, Other Voices, V.2, N.2, (March 2002), <http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/krstic/index.html>

78 One of the turbo-folk icons and celebrities of TV Pink was Svetlana Raznatovic-Ceca, also well-known as a wife, now widow, of the aforementioned criminal and warlord Zeljko Raznatovic Arkan. Her lifestyle was represented in the media as a modern Serbian fairytale crowned with her marriage to the most famous Serbian “patriot” Arkan. Like her husband, who wore a big Orthodox cross around his neck on special occasions, Ceca also “posed” with Orthodoxy. In one of her concerts she had a church choir and a big Orthodox cross as scenery while she was singing to Jesus. Their glamorous and problematic celebrity images promoted new values of an easy money and no ethical boundaries lifestyle in an economically exhausted Serbia, where ordinary citizens were struggling for the basics of life.

Some of the TV and radio stations were transmitting national songs, which were glorifying heroes from the First World War and anti-heroes, such as *chetniks* from the Second World War. This increased historical content in the public media prevailed in Serbia, which was overwhelmed with figures from the so-called heroic past, who had been neglected during the Tito era, but who were now in the service of the new regime's ideology. From the 1990s, on the streets of Serbia there was a whole market of historical and religious symbols that street-salesmen were offering to the nationally awakened consumers. Isolation of Serbia from the international community through the sanctions and embargo only strengthened the Milosevic regime in various ways, supporting xenophobia and nationalism.

Throughout the 1990s, Orthodox symbols were widespread and increased in the public sphere. Symbols such as Orthodox crosses and icons became a form of modern iconography which was exploited by many, from folk singers to paramilitary formations.<sup>79</sup> Criminals and paramilitaries were demonstrating their belonging to Orthodox Christianity usually wearing big golden crosses, but also asking blessings from the church leaders for the war operations.<sup>80</sup> Orthodoxy was presented in the media, which devoted a significant space to religious customs, celebration of the saints, church gatherings and so-called TV catechism. In parallel with the increase of the Orthodox content, the number of so called media prophets increased. The goal of these prophets was not just to read the destiny of the interested viewers but also to predict the future of Serbia. They were giving optimistic prophecies in which they

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79 Many organizations with clear pro-nationalist and even pro-fascist programmes embraced Orthodox symbolism on their web sites. Often their programme was represented as a fight for "moral resurrection" of Serbs. The notorious brigade JSO (Special Operations Unit) also known as Crvene Beretke (Red Berets), whose leader was recently convicted for the assassination of the Serbian Prime Minister Dr Zoran Djindjic in 2003, have on their web-site links to the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate and to other web pages of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Their hymn also included a verse which invoked the glorious past of the medieval Nemanjic dynasty. One of their songs posted on the same site called "Christ Oh God" represents a song of the soldiers who are leaving for the battle of Kosovo. The same song is used in the film of Zdravko Sotra *The Kosovo Battle* (1989). See <http://www.crveneberetke.com>. For other organizations see also <http://www.svetijustin.cjb.net/>, [www.nomokanon.org.yu](http://www.nomokanon.org.yu), <http://stari.dverisrpske.com/>, <http://www.obraz.org.yu/>, <http://www.vidovdan.org/>.

80 On the video clip of paramilitary formations *Scorpions*, we see this paramilitary troupe gathered around an Orthodox priest who is giving them a blessing before they go to Srebrenica. See *Serbs Tried over Srebrenica video*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4544498.stm>

saw a prosperous future only with president Milosevic at the head of Serbia.

Pseudo-history, religion, myths and superstition were a part of mediascape of the Milosevic regime. Combined with glamorous TV Pink entertainment and war propaganda they created a public opinion in which every voice of diversity was threatened to be persecuted if not terminated. Serbian independent media, writers and intellectuals were under continuous different threats, and as the rest of the opposition in Serbia was constantly under the attack. The massive protests of the students and citizens in Serbia were ignored and numbers of participants underestimated by the state TV RTS, popularly also called “TV Bastille.” In the late 1990s the continuous propaganda of “TV Bastille” caused a wave of protests in Serbia: citizens were coming out on their balconies hitting pots at the time when the national news started, which produced a synchronized sound in the cities, as a symbol of a changed perception of the Milosevic media.

The populist perception of Orthodoxy imposed by the regime's media, its contemporary connection to the rise of nationalism, and the interpretation of the religious-nationalist myths are some of the problems depicted in the selected Serbian films of my case study. The modern iconography of Orthodoxy is strongly connected to the criminalization of society and the new life style promoted in the media. How the films depicted the connection of Orthodoxy and nationalism to the social problems and the war will be analyzed in the following chapters.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I considered the concept of the political ideology of the 1990s, its formation and emergence into the public sphere. I discussed some of the important socio-political events which are connected to the creation of the political ideology of the Milosevic regime and its public affirmation. My aim was to shed light on the development of the nationalist-religious ideology, both in the political scene and church circles, and its populist promotion in the public discourse, which left long

term consequences on Serbian society. I first considered the period of the 1980s, the time of formation of the national ideology and the time when Milosevic rose to power. This is the period of the change of political discourse which now shifted towards nationalism. The *Memorandum* of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, as the first document which stated these new political premises, is discussed in this chapter since it provides the best insight into the new political ideology.

I also considered the reintroduction of national myths into public discourse and their political use. In parallel I analyzed how the Serbian Orthodox Church, politically revitalized, considered the Serbian national question and responded to the new political challenges of the 1980s. Consequently, with changes in the political course, the introduction of nationalism into the public sphere and a return to Serbian tradition and Orthodoxy, at the end of the 1980s the nationalist-religious ideology became part of the Milosevic regime. The emergence of nationalist-religious ideology as a political program is demonstrated in the analysis of the celebration of the Kosovo battle in 1989. I emphasized the political importance of nationalist-religious myths which were now used for the purposes of hegemonization of Serbs, the emergence of nationalism, and justification of the war to come. At the end of this chapter I discussed the main impact and consequences of nationalist-religious ideology in Serbian society and media.

The reason I introduce readers to the socio-political background is because it deepens reading and understanding the Serbian films. First contextualization of Serbian films only enriches discussion on whether and to what extent a film can be subversive when it is communicating within a certain ideological frame. Understanding the political context provides us with information regarding the extent to which films communicated within the ideological discourse of the 1990s and how it influenced their potential criticism. Also the content analysis makes more sense if it is done in parallel with a context analysis.

Second, Serbian films dealt with the Serbian society of the 1990s and depicted some



of the main problems that occurred during the Milosevic regime. To understand what the films described and more importantly whether they accurately expressed the criticism of the socio-political problems or they were just taking sides requires understanding of the main issues in Serbia at that time. In other words it is not possible to understand the potential subversiveness of the film text without understanding the socio-political background and the ideology that stood behind the war and the regime. Whether or not the Serbian films were subverting ideological premises of the regime cannot be considered without firstly understanding the main characteristics of this political ideology and its impacts, which led to a changed perception of the social, political and cultural issues in the Serbian public sphere. Therefore to consider how the films subverted the premises of the nationalist-religious ideology it is necessary first to know and understand this ideology. Subversion of the populist ideology that was still widely accepted in Serbia in the late 1980s and during the 1990s, represented not just disclosure of the regime and revelation of the real truth about the regime's machinations but also a serious blow to the political structures and main Serbian institutions, Academy, media and the Church for whom this ideology embodied what was at that time considered as Serbian identity. To attack Serbian identity at this time meant to attack the regime's ideology and many journalists, artists and writers who dared to do so were commonly seen as domestic traitors and were threatened or assassinated by the regime.

Selected films depicted the national ideology of Serbian society. Religious symbolism, for example as we will see further in the analysis, stands often in connection to nationalism. Therefore we can read them and understand only by contextualizing them. Serbian films paint the impact that these two ideologies had on Serbian society. Films also portrayed a shift from one ideological discourse of Yugoslavia to the new, nationalist one which also resulted in the reinterpretation of recent history. This common view of Yugoslav history in the 1990s, expressed in the aforementioned *Memorandum* is transferred into the films, as a part of their portrayal of the characteristics of the ruling ideology. All this shows that not only did the films

depict an emergence of the new ideology but also they provided some of its main characteristics. In this sense, many Serbian films of the 1990s dealt in different ways with the question of Yugoslav history, such as Yugoslavia as an artificial state or the revival of Serbian history, from the medieval period to World War II. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

The films also dealt with the criminalization of society, growth of violence and media propaganda, the issues highlighted in the last section of this chapter. The media was a mechanism through which the ruling structures imposed political ideology on society, and the great impact of media influence is represented in the films. The problem of media propaganda, depicted in the films, remains one of the main characteristics of Milosevic's regime. Serbian media did not work as for example Rwandan media did, which openly called people to genocide, but the "hate speech" spread by the regime's media together with the lists of undesirable journalists were nevertheless in the service of war propaganda and persecution.<sup>81</sup> Criminalization of society and violence were supported and shaped by the media. "Violence and destruction as a way of life found its expression in the whole cultural domain, from popular music and culture, music videos and tabloid press, to theatre drama and cinema."<sup>82</sup> The authors of the selected films offered, to a significant extent, a picture of Serbia of the 1990s, defined by ideological propaganda, a populist form of Orthodoxy, the increase of crime connected to the break-up of Yugoslavia, and the civil war. To understand the socio-political background is crucial for the reading of the selected films. The socio-political discourse created in the late 1980s, outlined in this chapter was depicted in the films, and was one of the criteria for the selection of these particular films.

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81 Paraphrased from Serbian, see Marko Milanovic in *Pescanik: Savrsena oluja*, 1. February 2008, [http://www.b92.net/info/emisije/pescanik.php?yyyy=2008&mm=02&nav\\_id=283597](http://www.b92.net/info/emisije/pescanik.php?yyyy=2008&mm=02&nav_id=283597); Last accessed: 5/02/2008.

82 Kronja, Ivana: *Violence as a Cause of and a Response to Frustration: Serbian Cinema and Violence Culture, 1990-2004*, <http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:5CoonC6ecZ8J:www.inter-disciplinary.net/ati/violence/v5/kronja%2520paper.pdf+do+koske+critique&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=uk&client=firefox-a>; Last accessed: 15/12/2008.

## Chapter 4

### Cinema as Socio-Political Critique

#### 4.0. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss a range of different Serbian films produced during the 1990s. I focus upon films which dealt with the break-up of Yugoslavia and the civil war but also with the consequences of the Milosevic regime on Serbian society. In this chapter first I briefly focus on the *Black Wave*, the specific cinematic tradition that developed within Yugoslav cinematography, and which is important for the further discussion of the cinema of the 1990s.

There are several reasons why I discuss the *Black Wave* movement in this chapter. First my aim is to point to this specific tradition of *politically engaged* (my italics) cinema that influenced later directors in this region. *Black Wave* had particular importance for its socio-political criticism of society because of which some scholars recognized it as “cinema of resistance.”<sup>1</sup> Second this discussion provides a historical context of Serbian cinematography. The term Serbian cinematography here refers to the films made after the break-up of Yugoslavia, and by directors located in Serbia. The history of Serbian cinematography was however hard to discuss separately for a long period of time as it was a part of the Yugoslav film industry.<sup>2</sup> In this sense this discussion is important for contextualization of later cinematic developments in former Yugoslavia and Serbia.<sup>3</sup>

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1 See Bjelic, Dusan: “Global Aesthetics and the Serbian Cinema of the 1990s” in Imre, Aniko, ed.: *East European Cinemas*, New York, London: Routledge, 2005, p.105.

2 Serbian film to a great extent developed in Yugoslavia. What Serbian cinematography really represents, its historical, political and cultural specifications is a matter of further studies on the Balkan and Yugoslav film. It would also be interesting to analyze the focus that Serbian cinematography had on war and historical themes from its early beginnings. This is certainly because of the specific historical circumstances in which Serbia was, but also shows the attention of the filmmakers gave to socio-historical events rather than to other themes.

3 The critical voice that cinema had during the socialist era can be good ground for future analysis of Balkan cinema and new and different forms of socio-political criticism in the post-war period in

The next reason for considering the *Black Wave* is in the fact that some of the *auteurs* continued their work in the 1990s, providing important reflections on the break-up of Yugoslavia. My intention is not to compare these two periods but rather to identify the most important aspects of this movement at the time. In the discussion of Serbian cinematography of the 1990s the influences of the *Black Wave* should not be overlooked, as the filmmakers were strongly engaged with the socio-political situation and as I will demonstrate, subverted some of the ideological premises of its time. In order to understand the films that I further analyse it is vital to put them within their specific cinematic context. To understand the 1990s cinemascapes it is important to know different traditions that possibly influenced Serbian cinematography.

In the second part of this chapter I explore the Serbian cinema of the 1990s. The discussion of the cinemascapes starts with a film that was made just before the Yugoslav break-up at the end of the 1980s, *The Kosovo Battle* (*Boj na Kosovu*, Zdravko Sotra, 1989) because of its distinctive propagandist aspect and connection to the ideological discourse of the Milosevic regime. I then discuss the range of films produced during the 1990s. I narrow my discussion according to the themes that prevailed in the film narrative: violence, civil war and the depiction of ideologies. I discuss different perspectives that filmmakers bring to the same subject, which is the tragedy of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the new ideological discourse in Serbia, which gradually led to the break-up of Serbian society in an economic, cultural and moral sense. In this chapter I identify several films for their unique approach in depicting the regime's ideology and its consequences on Serbian society. I analyze, for example, *Keg of Gunpowder* for its specific cinematic portrayal of violence and *Premeditated Murder* for its depiction of ideologies and their impact on society and the people.

Finally in my conclusion I also briefly outline why in the next chapters I further analyse two specific films, *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* and *Wounds*. This chapter,

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Yugoslav region.

therefore, together with chapters 5 and 6 represent one coherent piece on the exploration of the cinematic representation of nationalist-religious ideology, the socio-political and cultural issues that the films depicted and the subversive aspects of these representations.

#### **4.1. Historical Context: The *Black Wave* Movement**

In this section I consider the *Black Wave* movement that emerged in Yugoslavia during the 1960s. My aim is to point to the tradition of politically engaged films in Yugoslav cinematography whose strongest example is the *Black Wave* movement. This movement represented the beginning of the new era in the Yugoslav cinematography. In the first place the *Black Wave* demonstrates how film can be a good platform for social-political criticism. A brief review of this movement explains the importance that films had in contemporary society but also shows their interdependence upon official policies in the region of former Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavian film critics claimed that the approach to film making in Tito's Yugoslavia differed from the social realistic approach established in other communist countries.<sup>4</sup> Yugoslavia had an open market for so-called Western cinematography and at the same time developed film schools, including the institutions such as the Yugoslav Film Archive, now Film Archive centred in Belgrade, all of which influenced the creation of a strong film culture in this region.<sup>5</sup> It was in these specific socio-political and cultural circumstances that the most famous *auteurs* of the Yugoslav cinematography developed their skills. Film *auteurs* were inspired with the French New Wave and the Italian Neo-realism, especially by authors such as Goddard or Truffaut, and the *Black Wave* movement may be

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4 Pop Trajkov, Igor: *In Search of Happiness, Zelimir Zilnik Interviewed*, <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/03/trajkov03.php>; Last accessed: 15/03/2008.

5 Yugoslav Film Archive is the national film library of the Republic of Serbia, founded in 1949 as The Central Film Archives of the Yugoslav Film Library. Its status varied during the years; according to the Law on the Protection of the Monuments of Culture it is ranked today as an institution of special importance for the Republic of Serbia. Yugoslav Film Archive is one of the founders and a permanent member of FIAF, <http://www.kinoteka.org.yu/engl.htm>; Last accessed: 19/09/2008.

considered as a part of the New Wave.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4.2.1. *Auteurs* and Their Films

In the 1960s with the appearance of *auteur* film the conventions of social realism in the arts were completely abandoned. The 1960s *auteurs* did not pay too much attention to the cosmetic representation of socialist life but instead turned to the exploration of reality. They had no interest in demagoguery but expressed intellectual criticism of different social and political deviations, which no one had spoken about before in the world of cinema. This cinematographic movement remained famous as the *Black Wave*. The group of filmmakers, such as Aleksandar Petrovic, Dusan Makavejev, Zivojin Pavlovic, Kokan Rakonjac, Marko Babac, Zelimir Zilnik, or Purisa Djordjevic, explored themes from ordinary life and revealed many negative aspects of socialism. This broke existing socio-political taboos.<sup>7</sup> Such ideological criticism, where artists spoke freely on the most sensitive issues, was too much for the establishment. While the state bureaucrats were puzzled by the political correctness of this new cultural appearance, a wave of similar films swept across the cinema world.

Zivojin Pavlovic's masterpieces, such as *Awakening of Rats* (1967) and *When I am Pale and Dead* (1968), provided completely new perspectives on the ideological premises of Socialist Yugoslavia since "Pavlovic did not accept any thematic limitations and his criticism was often transformed into cynical naturalism."<sup>8</sup> This film, as other films of the *Black Wave*, reflected the *auteurs'* personal gaze on ongoing issues in society. Aleksandar Petrovic is one of the *Black Wave* filmmakers whose films gained international reputation. His film *Three* (1965) received the

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6 Paraphrased from the Serbian language: Aleksandar Petrovic was inspired by Antonioni, Zelimir Zilnik by Godard while Dusan Makavejev was more influenced by Soviet avant-garde films. Tirnanic, Bogdan: *Tajna istorija Jugo filma*, [www.profil.co.yu/prikazitekst.asp?Tekst=62](http://www.profil.co.yu/prikazitekst.asp?Tekst=62); Last accessed 15/06/2007.

7 The new film *auteurs* were usually divided into the Belgrade, Zagreb or Ljubljana group according to the film centres and experimental styles they practised. See Goulding, Daniel: *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, p. 72-77.

8 Volk, Petar: *Srpski Film*, Beograd: Institut za Film, 1996, p. 88.

award at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival, and *Feather Gatherers* (1967), won Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Petrovic's success was not enough to protect him from the pressures from the top. His open criticism of the state dogmatism was seen as rebellion.<sup>9</sup> Finally, after the affair around the film *Plastic Jesus* (1973) made by his student Lazar Stojanovic, Aleksandar Petrovic had to leave his post at Belgrade Film Academy.<sup>10</sup>

The next film of the *Black Wave*, *Early Works* (*Rani radovi*, Zelimir Zilnik, 1969) won a Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival.<sup>11</sup> Zilnik's personal sensibility in dealing with the failures of socialist doctrine was viewed as an attempt to undermine basic principles on which Yugoslavia was established. It was hard to prove all the charges against Zilnik's film, especially when the film became very popular with the so-called "liberal audience" and was recognized as "an alternative cinema."<sup>12</sup> The issue of freedom of artistic expression became a subject of debates. Tributes to Zilnik could not stop the criticism that was coming from the Government which resulted with the persecution of the *Black Wave* filmmakers. Zilnik's film was the first Serbian film against which a court case was held. After controversial debates that this film produced in public, *Early Works* was in the end not officially forbidden.<sup>13</sup>

Dusan Makavejev, one of the most internationally famous *Black Wave auteurs* was also a target of state criticism based on similar arguments. His *WR Mysteries of*

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9 Volk, Petar: *Ibid*, p. 92.

10 Aleksandar Petrovic, [www.answers.com/topic/aleksandar-petrovic-writer-director-cinematographer-drama](http://www.answers.com/topic/aleksandar-petrovic-writer-director-cinematographer-drama); Last accessed: 10/06/2007.

11 Zelimir Zilnik is one of the prominent Serbian directors. His film opus includes feature films and documentaries. Some of the films for which he is remembered is his first feature film *Rani Radovi* (*Early Works* 1969), *Nezaposleni ljudi* (*The Unemployed*, 1968), *Lijepe žene prolaze kroz grad* (*Pretty Women Walking Through the City*, 1985), *Tako se kalio celik* (*How Steel Was Tempered*, 1988), *Tito po drugi put medju Srbima* (*Tito for the Second Time Amongst the Serbs*, 1993), *Dupe od mramora* (*Marble Ass*, 1995), *Kud plovi ovaj brod* (*Wanderlust*, 1998), *Tvrđava Evropa* (*Fortress Europe*, 2000). Since 1980 he has been formulating a specific language of docu-dramas. He founded the Teresianum production company in Budapest in 1993. The following year he helped in initiating video and television production for the most radical and independent media in Yugoslavia at that time - B92 in Belgrade. His feature and documentary dramas are regarded as cult films not only in former Yugoslavia's alternative scene. *Zelimir Zilnik*, [http://www.isolacinema.org/05e/?page\\_id=195](http://www.isolacinema.org/05e/?page_id=195); Last accessed: 15/06/2007.

12 Volk, Petar: *Ibid*, p. 91.

13 Volk, Petar: *Ibid*, p. 91.

*Organism* (1971) raised many debates on the moral and political aspects of the film. The film had great success at international festivals and at the same time was banned in Yugoslavia. The power structures perceived the content and symbolism in this film as “counter-revolutionary and unacceptable.”<sup>14</sup> “WR” in the title of film was associated with Wilhelm Reich, a controversial imprisoned psychologist. Makavejev refers to Reich to express “his own disgust of both communism's hatred of creativity and capitalism's idolatry of consumerism.”<sup>15</sup> The film represented a call for liberation, both political and sexual, which is a common theme in all his works. At the same time the story remains “a satire on communism.”<sup>16</sup> The affair raised by the film resulted in the end in Makavejev's leaving the country.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of the success at international festivals, in Yugoslavia the *auteurs* and their films were subjected to political persecution. The positive reception of films abroad, was considered in Yugoslavia as a “conspiracy of world imperialism against socialism.”<sup>18</sup> The criticism that films expressed and new cineaste style were too much for political structures and the films were banned.

#### 4.2.2. Ideological Criticism

The appearance of *auteur* film brought a new approach and perspectives into cinematic expression. The criticism expressed through these films was clearly stating the need for social and political changes. Because of their controversial character films were perceived by the political structures as a threat to the existing order and state establishment. The bureaucratic system overlooked the larger perspective that the films provided. Their criticism was not aimed only at communism but also at capitalism. In spite of political repercussions, the films of the *Black Wave* represent the golden age in the cinematography of Yugoslavia. One of the famous *auteurs*,

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14 Volk, Petar: *Ibid*, p. 92.

15 Morris, Gary: *Sweet Movies: Four Films by Dusan Makavejev*, [www.brightlightsfilm.com/33/makavejev.html](http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/33/makavejev.html); Last accessed: 13/08/2007.

16 Morris, Gary: *Ibid*.

17 Morris, Gary: *Ibid*.

18 Tirnanic, Bogdan: *Ibid*.



Zelimir Zilnik has stated about his colleagues and their profession that they were aware that “the entire atmosphere of society could have been changed.”<sup>19</sup> According to Zilnik, he and his colleagues followed major changes in Eastern communist ideology and western capitalist ideology. Their critical angle and reflections on humanity captured an existing division in the world developed from these observations.<sup>20</sup> Being aware of the errors of the ideological system in which they lived, their intention was not just to bring changes into the film making system but also to express the necessity for changes in society. The *Black Wave auteurs* successfully developed a unique approach in film making style, which was new and revolutionary in Yugoslavian cinematography.

The symbolism and themes of the *Black Wave* could be applied to many issues in the 1990s. For example, Makavejev’s magician, a man who hypnotizes the masses in *Man is Not a Bird* symbolizes the power of a leader. The fascination with a leader and his capability to hypnotize the masses can be read as a reference to Milosevic.<sup>21</sup> Makavejev defined this “fascination with leadership and the inability to escape from this mentality as a mass inductive stage where faith in a big leader, inherited from tribal mentality, predominates in times of crisis.”<sup>22</sup> This ideological criticism had a prophetic connotation, since Makavejev's depiction of a leader was not just a caricature of Tito's cult of personality of the time, but a reflection on the people and the culture capable of embracing such an ideological concept.

Realism remained an important characteristic of the movement. Realistic representations of life were a result of *auteurs* resistance to embracing the political dogmatism of the time. Progressiveness and freedom of socialist Yugoslavia, that were not supposed to be questioned, were undermined in these films as a false picture of reality. The *Black Wave* therefore represented a critique of the political

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19 Pop Trajkov, Igor: *Ibid.*

20 See Pop Trajkov, Igor: *Ibid.*

21 See Roganovic, Vesna: *Razgovori sa Dusanom Makavejevom: Srbija, od kanabeta do katarze (1), Ispali smo iz vremena, hocemo li se iskobeljati?* [www.danas.co.yu/20030405/vikend6htm](http://www.danas.co.yu/20030405/vikend6htm); Last accessed: 13/08/2007.

22 Roganovic, Vesna: *Ibid.*

ideology of its time. This is one of the reasons why the political structures wanted to eliminate the independent voice that was coming from the cinema.

The *Black Wave* was also considered by some scholars to be a product of the system as it “derived from the system itself” and therefore its filmmakers were not “true dissidents, but the system's own “built-in” critics.”<sup>23</sup> This movement, often simply taken as a form of capitalist critique of communism, can also be considered as a left wing, Marxist critique of the corrupted ideas of socialism. The *Black Wave* nevertheless, as a politically engaged cinematic movement, offered significant criticism of the system representing “an aesthetic resistance to the regime's cosmetic view of social reality.”<sup>24</sup> The universality of the stories and the exploration of diverse political issues, social taboos, and ideological blindness, gives *Black Wave* films a contemporary dimension.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.2.3. The Importance of the *Black Wave* Movement

The *Black Wave* movement had tremendous importance in the cinematography of former Yugoslavia. The *auteur* unique aesthetic style and innovative ideas introduced new forms of cinematic expressions in Yugoslav cinema. The provocative and controversial style which was breaking established norms gave them the epithet of films of resistance. Zelimir Zilnik describes this time in the following words: “cinematography existed because some really big questions were supposed to be asked through films – like: How would it be to change this world?”<sup>26</sup> Directors such as Zelimir Zilnik, Zivojin Pavlovic or Lazar Stojanovic continued their work in the 1990s with politically engaged films.<sup>27</sup> The recently made documentary *Censored without Censorship* (*Zabranjeni bez zabrane*, Milan Nikodijevic, Dinko Tucakovic,

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23 Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p.105.

24 Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p.105.

25 They can be seen as a study in human behavior, taboos, personal and social limitations and the complexity of life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. See: [http://www.dssound.com/black\\_wave.html](http://www.dssound.com/black_wave.html)

26 Pop Trajkov, Igor: *Ibid*.

27 Lazar Stojanovic directed a documentary *Scorpions* (*Skorpioni*, 2007) film about the paramilitary group and the war crimes committed in Bosnia. The film was produced by the Fund for Humanitarian Law in Belgrade. The film received great attention and caused various discussions in Serbia.

Serbia, 2006) highlights the socio-political context in which the *Black Wave* arose, how and why the authors and their films, master-pieces of Yugoslav cinematography were persecuted and banned in the end. Yugoslav authors who refused to adopt politically correct language, which would mean denying their critical point of view, were exposed to a form of, in words of one of the authors, “soft dictatorship's political methods.”

Some scholars claimed that after the *Black Wave* came the period of so called “Hollywoodization” of the cinema.<sup>28</sup> After the *Black Wave* movement in the late 1960s and the 1970s, Yugoslav cinema returned, to some extent, to so-called ideologically correct films, which depicted partisans' struggle against Germans glorifying Tito as a leader, while Tito was played by Hollywood celebrities such as Richard Burton (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Josip Broz Tito and his wife Jovanka with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor  
<http://www.ilustrovana.com/tekst.php?broj=2590&tekst=02>

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28 See Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 105.

This Hollywoodization, as Dusan Bjelic claims, was never abandoned and influenced filmmakers in the 1990s. Therefore some Serbian films of the 1990s were often seen as Hollywood style movies. Srdjan Dragojevic, the director, on the other hand claimed that his films were *auteur* films, wrongly labelled as Hollywood style cinema. The filmmakers in Yugoslavia however were exposed to influences from both traditions. Other scholars claimed that Yugoslav cinema “never managed to develop the industrial dimension characteristic of Hollywood and the rest of the West.”<sup>29</sup>

In a period of “apolitical cinema”<sup>30</sup> in the 1970s and 1980s, Prague film school directors such as Goran Paskaljevic, Goran Markovic or Emir Kusturica, gained international success.<sup>31</sup> In the 1980s the black comedy genre developed, and films such as *Ko to tamo peva* (*Who's That Singing Over There*, Slobodan Sijan, 1980), *Maratonci trce pocasni krug* (*The Marathon Family*, Slobodan Sijan, 1982) or *Balkanski spijun* (*Balkan Spy*, Dusan Kovacevic, Bozidar Nikolic, 1981) received cult status, leaving an impact on generations of audiences.<sup>32</sup> Black comedy however became a form of cultural phenomenon that provided a kind of “psychological valve in troubled times.”<sup>33</sup> Elements of black comedy can be found in many 1990s films.

It is important to say that Yugoslav cinema was influenced by different cinematic traditions that overlapped in this region of Europe. In considering the cinematic style and subversiveness of 1990s film, comparison to the *Black Wave* often comes as inevitable. My intention is however not to compare these periods but to emphasize

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29 Longinovic, Tomislav: “Playing the Western Eye: Balkan Masculinity and Post-Yugoslav War Cinema” in Imre, Aniko, ed.: *East European Cinemas*, New York, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 35

30 Longinovic, Tomislav: *Ibid.*, p. 36.

31 For example, *Otac na sluzbenom putu* (*When Father Was Away on Business*, 1985) by Emir Kusturica won Palme D'Or and FIPRESCI Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1985, Golden Arena at the Pula Film Festival of Yugoslavian films, and was nominated for Golden Globe and Oscar in 1986.

32 Phrases from these films emerged into daily speech in Serbia, they were quoted randomly and phrases and jokes from these films remained for a long time in local jargon. See Milana Vujkov unpublished MA Dissertation: *Black Humour in Serbian Films of the Early Eighties and Its Cultural Consequences: The Cinema Of Slobodan Sijan and Dusan Kovacevic*, October 2005. MA History of Film and Visual Media, Birkbeck College, University of London.

33 Milana Vujkov: *Ibid.*

the importance of this specific cinematic tradition. The fact that Serbian cinema has such pre-history enables us to contextualize it within a very specific cinematic culture that produced politically engaged films. This contributes to the later discussion on the cinematic subversiveness of the 1990s films.

#### **4.3. Serbian Cinema of the 1990s**

In this section I discuss the cinemascapes of the 1990s, focussing upon several specific Serbian films produced during this period of time. Due to the new socio-political circumstances in the country, with the escalation of the war, economic collapse and international embargo, Serbian cinematography entered a difficult period after the “national cinema financing had collapsed.”<sup>34</sup>

In these new circumstances Serbian cinematography, compared to earlier periods, was not so prolific in its productivity because “cinematography was in a large part marginalized due to the country's deep economic crisis, and cultural strategies of the regime.”<sup>35</sup> In spite of the difficulties some significant films were produced, and directors had to turn to independent financial sources, often relying on foreign assistance. My intention is to explore the extent to which film directors were engaged with ongoing changes in Serbian society, how they represented the ideological frame of the 1990s and the outbreak of the civil war.

In the first section I discuss how the cinema was used to promote the new ideological discourse of the Milosevic regime discussed in chapter 3. Next I survey the dominant cinematic themes in Serbian films of the 1990s. My aim is to explore the extent to which the film directors were engaged with the socio-political reality of their time and to briefly discuss the different views that they provided on the ongoing crisis. I also focus upon three major themes that prevailed in Serbian films, violence, civil

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34 Longinovic, Tomislav: *Ibid*, p. 37.

35 Kronja, Ivana: *Violence as a Cause of and a Response to Frustration: Serbian Cinema and Violence Culture, 1990 – 2004*, p.1, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ati/violence/v5/kronja%20paper.pdf>

war, and the representation of ideology, and I discuss them separately. My conclusion is devoted to the discussion of Serbian film as a social-political critique, in which I consider how the films represented the ideological context of the 1990s.

#### 4.3.1. 1989: Screening the Myth

The discussion on the cinemascope of the 1990s starts with a film made in 1989, *The Battle of Kosovo* (*Boj na Kosovu*, Zdravko Sotra, 1989). I discuss this film because it embodied the nationalist discourse of the late 1980s and as such represented a sort of cinematic introduction into the war. The production of the film overlapped with the nationalist-religious revival in Serbia and the film to a significant extent represents a form of expression of this political discourse.<sup>36</sup> The film is based on a drama written by the academic Ljubomir Simovic.<sup>37</sup> Although the drama was written on the initiative of the Yugoslav Drama Theatre, it was not put on the stage. Radio Television of Serbia, RTS, preparing for the celebration of the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kosovo battle, in 1989, was interested in the text, but instead of the planned TV series they decided to make a film. The writer, Ljubomir Simovic, based the plot on the *Kosovo Myth* emphasizing the nationalist-religious and ethical aspects of the legend of Lazar. To a great extent this film reflected political stances of the late 1980s.

As Serbian historian Olivera Milosavljevic argued, the messages of the film certainly speak more about the political context of the 1980s than about the time of the actual Kosovo battle in 1389.<sup>38</sup> Simovic published a new version of his drama in 2003, in which he excluded many parts that previously served as political slogans suitable for the context of Milosevic's mythological-nationalist discourse. For example, the words that Milica, Lazar's wife says, and the speech of Lazar's son Stefan echo the

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36 See chapter 3 and the discussion on the importance of this myth in the creation of the mythological-nationalist discourse in section 3.3. The Role of the *Kosovo Myth* in Formation of the Political Ideology.

37 Ljubomir Simovic, a dramatist, writer and a poet, became a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1988.

38 Radio B92, Pescanik: *Srpska državnička mudrost i sokački patriotizam*, 15. novembar, 2003. [http://www.b92.net/info/emisije/pescanik.php?yyyy=2003&mm=11&nav\\_id=125533](http://www.b92.net/info/emisije/pescanik.php?yyyy=2003&mm=11&nav_id=125533)

political propaganda of the late 1980s. Milica speaks about a Serbia which always stands silent while others are determining her destiny, and Stefan prays for the Serbian people to finally rise and stand again united “under one wreath.”<sup>39</sup> Both represent official political stances based on a discourse of the aforementioned *Memorandum* and the idea of historical injustice against Serbs<sup>40</sup>, which has to be ended through the reunion of Serbs under the political umbrella of Milosevic. Milica's speech expresses the ideas exposed in the text of *Memorandum*, while Stefan expresses the political determination of Serbs to fight injustice and “be resurrected”<sup>41</sup> again through the national program embodied in nationalist-religious ideology. In fact *Kosovo Battle* is a film that speaks within the ideological context of its time and as such it clearly expressed the contemporary nationalist-religious ideology that emanates from the *Kosovo Myth*. In this way the mythological content of the film was suitable for using as a folding-screen for the affirmation of the new political course. *Kosovo Battle* therefore can be considered not only as a historic-epic saga but as a propagandist film of the regime. With the beginning of the 1990s the cinemascapes changed and the film directors became more critically engaged with the socio-political situation in the country.

#### 4.3.2. Mapping the Films: Dominant Cinematic Themes

The films that were produced during the 1990s abounded with themes such as the break-up of Yugoslavia, the destruction of Serbian society and the escalation of violence. Many films offered different perspectives on the recent Yugoslav history and the Tito era (1945-1980). Discussions of Yugoslav history emerged into the public sphere and eventually in films. Occasionally as in the case of *Underground*

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<sup>39</sup> See Radio B92, Pescanik: *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>41</sup> The term “resurrection” was often used in populist discourse. It does not refer to Christ's resurrection but means primarily the revival of the Serbian nation. Populist discourse of this time was strongly using mythological language to describe political plans, and the use of the term resurrection is a good example of this political trend. During the NATO aggression on Serbia in 1999, the Church leaders in their speeches emphasized that the Serbian suffering has great Christian meaning and that death is a “pre-condition of resurrection”. See: *We will not deny sanctity of Kosovo and Metohija*, The Metropolitan Amfilohije in the Monastery Djurdjevi Stupovi, [http://www.mitropolija.cg.yu/dvavoda/besede/mit\\_bs-stupovi\\_99\\_1.html](http://www.mitropolija.cg.yu/dvavoda/besede/mit_bs-stupovi_99_1.html)

(*Podzemlje*, Emir Kusturica, 1995), which will be discussed later, films took a perspective which proved controversial. *Tito and I* (*Tito i ja*, Goran Markovic, 1992) dealing with Tito's image in a humorous way spoke about a darker side of Yugoslavia's political system and the cult of a leader. Besides feature films there was a number of documentaries produced in this period, such as Dusan Makavejev's *Hole in the Soul* (*Rupa u dusi*, 1995) a personal perspective on the Yugoslav war.

A number of films produced in the 1990s show the thematic diversity that existed within the world of cinema. Films like Goran Paskaljevic's *Tango Argentino* (Yugoslavia, 1992), that represented problems of elderly people, *Someone Else's America* (*Tudja Amerika*, France, UK, Germany, Greece, Yugoslavia, 1995) an immigrants' saga, or *Virdzina* (*Virgina*, Srdjan Karanovic, 1991) a story about the custom of a girl being raised as a boy in the family with no male offspring, received domestic and international attention. Srdjan Dragojevic's comedy *We are Not Angels* (*Mi nismo andjeli*, 1992) screened at the dawn of Yugoslav wars, recognized also as so called "pink comedy" became a blockbuster. In 1994 Aleksandar Petrovic, a *Black Wave* director, made his last film *Seobe* (*Migrations*) based on the book by Milos Crnjanski.<sup>42</sup> This epic-historic spectacle was made with foreign co-production.<sup>43</sup> One of the films made in the early 1990s, that remained a weak attempt at cinematic engagement with socio-political changes in Serbia was Darko Bajic's *Black Bomber* (*Crni bombarder*, 1992). Set in Belgrade, in the year 1999, the film tells a story about a police state and rock 'n' roll rebels who fight against the system. The film makes many parallels to reality. For example, the main character works for the underground radio station, in the film called "Boom 92", which recalls the name of the independent Radio B92, which was a symbol of anti-regime struggle. The name of the radio station was inspired by reality, the demonstrations showed in the film remind the audience of the first big demonstrations against Milosevic held on 9<sup>th</sup>

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42 Milos Crnjanski (1896-1977) was one of the most prominent representatives of modern literary expressionism. He was a poet, writer and diplomat.

43 Petrovic was rehabilitated in 1991 after persecution during Tito's time. *Seobe* was an old project where filming had been postponed for more than two decades. Although this was supposed to be the first Serbian historical spectacle in recent history, it cannot be contextualized in the same manner as *Kosovo Battle*, that will be discussed later, and that had direct and important political messages in the context of the regime. In this sense these two films represent completely different projects.



of March 1991. When the main character sends a call to rebellion through the radio station he starts demonstrations that nevertheless fail in the end. Bajic's attempt to emphasize the power of rock 'n' roll life style against the state provided no substantial criticism of the state's politics nor did it show the significance of 1991 demonstrations.

Many film directors throughout the 1990s dealt with the socio-political themes of the time, showing the disintegration of Serbian society. Here I mention some of the films which were inspired by the dramatic changes in Serbian society, known to the wider Serbian audience. What they all have in common, as Dina Iordanova argues, is depiction of a “depressing atmosphere, the ruined lives of this younger generation and their growing desperation and madness.”<sup>44</sup> The films portrayed the consequences of the new political system on Serbian society. A dark picture of Belgrade, so common in many of the films mentioned, is not a result of *auteurs* vision but represents a depiction of the reality of that time. It is important to bear in mind that these films were not made in a time of peace, after a certain passage of time that would allow an objective view and analysis of what has happened, but on the contrary they were all produced at the actual time of the crisis, the war and turbulent years, which affected the film industry and certainly influenced filmmakers in choosing the themes for their films.

Films such as *Between Heaven and Earth* (*Ni na nebu ni na zemlji*, Milos Radivojevic, 1994), or *Boulevard of Revolution* (*Bulevar revolucije*, Vladimir Blazevski, 1992) depict the atmosphere of Belgrade changing after the collapse of the communist system, the emergence of new values and their impacts on the so-called lost generations. Dragan Kresoja's *Dark is the Night* (*Tamna je noc*, 1995) on the other hand depicts the impacts of the civil war and economic collapse on ordinary people. The film describes Belgrade of 1992, the escalation of the war and student protests.

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44 Iordanova, Dina: *Cinema of Flames*, London: British Film Institute, 2001, p. 267.

Goran Markovic's *Tragedy Burlesque* (*Urnebesna tragedija*, 1995) provides a unique critical aspect on Milosevic's Serbia. The director uses black humour to paint an isolated society and its citizens. The story about a psychiatric hospital that needs to be shut down because of the unbearable conditions caused by the economic collapse is a parable for Serbian society, while patients who are abandoned represent the citizens. The film describes Serbia under the Milosevic regime as a place “where the normal ones are depressed and incapacitated, while the deviant ones thrive on chaos.”<sup>45</sup>

The director investigates the question of normality and insanity in contemporary Serbia on the edge of absurdity. One of the rare films which specifically dealt with the economic collapse and the stratification of society is a social drama *Diary of Insults*, (*Dnevnik Uvreda*, Zdravko Sotra, 1993). The film explores Serbia under economic embargo, the melting of the middle class and the collapse of the system of values. It provides the same dark picture of an isolated Serbia, characteristic of other films of that time, in which ordinary people are left on their own to survive in extraordinary conditions. The film is set in 1993, the time of galloping inflation that contributed to the growth of poverty and the stratification of society. The story of Ana and Stefan, a retired, educated and once respected couple shows how as the economic crisis deepens they at the same time get estranged from each other, handling the collapse in their own different ways: Stefan is protecting his dignity by pretending he is still living a normal life while Ana struggles to provide bread every day. A tragic denouement takes place when police find Ana frozen on the street where she was selling home made hats. The film reveals several important social aspects of the 1990s such as the destruction of families caused by the economic collapse, every day starvation and the difficult position of women in this economic situation. Through Ana's character, the film shows the effects of the crisis on the female population which during the 1990s became a significant generator of economic income for the families by doing various kinds of jobs.<sup>46</sup>

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45 Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 268.

46 See Radovic, Milja: *Images of Women in Serbian media*, [http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/regions/europe/european\\_articles/images\\_of\\_women\\_in\\_serbian\\_media](http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/regions/europe/european_articles/images_of_women_in_serbian_media)

A major number of the films however dealt with the theme of the consequences of the regime's politics on Serbian society. These consequences were represented in various ways, from depiction of the growth of violence and economic collapse in Serbia, to the revival of national mythology and the escalation of the civil war. In the next section I focus on the cinematic portrayal of violence and crime, which came as a direct result of the war and the regime's politics.

#### 4.3.3. Violence in Films: Cabaret Balkans

In this section I discuss the films which focused specifically upon the issues of crime and violence. *Rage* (*Do Koske*, Boban Skerlic, 1997) is a case in point as a film about the escalation of violence and crime in Belgrade in the 1990s in which street murders and gun shooting became a part of everyday life. The film shows the clash between the generation of so-called old criminals faced with new young gangsters who have no idea of their bosses' connection to the police and state structures. The film depicts the growing problem of crime in Belgrade, the atmosphere of everyday shootings, and the state of mind of young criminals. To be a criminal, violent and destructive, was a form of fashion among youngsters many of whom were still in high school. The popularity of a criminal life style in Milosevic's culture is a problem depicted in the film *Wounds*, which will be analyzed separately in Chapter 6. *Rage* explores the culture of violence of the 1990s as the consequence of "society's corruption."<sup>47</sup> According to some scholars, like Ivana Kronja, the Serbian directors in their depiction of violence identified with American cinema "the stereotypes of typical genre films could not express the complexity of the situation."<sup>48</sup> Anti-heroes in Serbian films offer no catharsis for the audience, their ending is not a happy ending, good does not defeat evil, and brutality wins, all of which are elements that mirror the reality of the 1990s. In this sense, "the reality precedes the style."<sup>49</sup> *Rage* is therefore a story about specific violence in a specific place, whose causes are to be

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47 Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid.*

48 Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid.*

49 Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid.*

found in regime's politics: violence is organized, controlled and derives from the system itself.

An important film that deals with the problem of violence and which gained international reputation is a film of a famous Yugoslav and Serbian director Goran Paskaljevic: *Keg of Gunpowder* (*Bure Baruta*), also translated as *Cabaret Balkans*. The story takes place within one night in Belgrade, at the time when Serbia was under the international embargo. The night time, in which events are set, portrays the dark atmosphere of Serbia of the 1990s, as a metaphoric picture of the place where “time does not flow.”<sup>50</sup> Excluded from the international context Serbia is depicted as an isolated space in which the people are estranged from each other. In such circumstances, where violence developed as a cultural model, characters use violence as the only means to communicate with each other. Comparisons to Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* are inevitable, since Paskaljevic uses cabaret as a backstage and for the interconnection between the main stories.<sup>51</sup>

A strong reminder of Fosse's portrayal of the Nazi atmosphere in prewar Germany comes out of the fact that Paskaljevic paints the decadence and brutality of a society blinded by the ideology of the regime in power. This introspective portrayal of an isolated Serbia and its citizens provides a depressing picture of a disintegrated society which Paskaljevic paints as *Cabaret Balkans*. While *Rage* shows more of the street crime and sadistic behaviour of Belgrade's youth, Paskaljevic is more concerned with so-called ordinary people, who in exceptional circumstances, become “kegs of gunpowder” ready to explode. The film investigates how people were “pushed into practising violence which used to be a previous cause of their frustration.”<sup>52</sup>

*Keg of Gunpowder* is a film that functions on both universal and local level. The universality is in the very subject of violence, which is represented “aesthetically

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<sup>50</sup> Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p.111.

<sup>51</sup> See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 269.

<sup>52</sup> Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid*.

rather than ideologically.”<sup>53</sup> The absence of nationalism resembles anonymity of global power<sup>54</sup>, for which reason the story could be set in any city of the world and therefore recognized by audiences in any part of the world. Yet, at the same time the film is a local story about everyday street violence, triggered by ethnic violence and the war. Ethnic violence as classless conflict, as Dusan Bjelic argues, “opened the door for fragmentation and globalization of the Balkans.”<sup>55</sup> In this way the film provides both global and local perspectives on the Balkans violence and conflict at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Belgrade is used as a setting for four parallel stories about violence in which the main protagonists are perpetrators or victims of violence. The film follows a “non-linear narrative” to “challenge pastoral semiotics of Serb national unity.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore I argue that when we speak about the representation of violence in Serbian cinema, which was inspired by the escalation of violence in reality, we should speak about it as a form of “holy aggression.”<sup>57</sup> Holy aggression becomes a cultural model and a way of communication and represents a direct consequence of the regime's ideology. *Cabaret Balkans* is therefore not a story about an exotic place in which violent people dwell, but a story about the isolated Serbian society ruled by a violent regime. The aggression was introduced and justified through the nationalist-religious discourse, discussed in chapter 3, which legitimated violence for sacred purposes. This was done in various ways, including the media promotion of war criminals as patriots.<sup>58</sup> “Noir journey”<sup>59</sup> through Milosevic's Belgrade of the 1990s paints also the consequences of the war although the war is absent in the film. How the war and conflict were represented in other films of the 1990s will be discussed next.

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53 See Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 107.

54 See Bjelic Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 108-109.

55 Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 108.

56 Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 107-108.

57 See Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Ibid*, p. 132.

58 “The crime wave on the ground of Serbia only followed the killings, robbery and even genocide in the warfare in Croatia and Bosnia committed by paramilitary forces, whose bosses were pronounced patriots in Serbian media.” Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid*.

59 Goulding, Daniel: “Liberated Cinema”, p. 204 quoted in Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 108.

#### 4.3.4. The War in Films

During the 1990s a number of films produced dealt with the escalation of the war in former Yugoslavia. War scenes became a background for cinematic stories which dramatized themes such as friendship, love and deception in the light of real death and collapse. Ordinary human stories in such a way provided material for contemplations on existential issues of life and death, frequently asking questions such as: *who is my neighbour?* (my italics) The following three films that I mention here dealt with the tragedy of Vukovar, one of the most devastated cities during the civil war, whose tragedy in the opinion of many critics, and as we will see later, was never properly represented on the big screen.

Vukovar's destruction was the most depicted in Boro Draskovic's *Vukovar: Poste Restante* (*Vukovar jedna prica*, Cyprus, Italy, Yugoslavia, 1994). The love story of a young couple is set in the site of the destroyed city. The marriage of Ana and Toma is shaken and finally destroyed through the rise of national intolerance and the war. At the same time as Vukovar is being destroyed, Ana and Toma's marriage distorts to the extent that they become complete strangers. Although the story reflects many mixed marriages of former Yugoslavia whose "faith" was determined by the war, the film provoked a great deal of controversy. Although Draskovic tried to paint the horrors of the war through the story of ordinary people, his attempt was to some extent played down by critics. The film was perceived by some audiences and critics as not being objective towards those who were responsible for the destruction of Vukovar.<sup>60</sup> Imagined to be a story of destroyed human lives in the midst of a bloody war, the film actually opened up the question of politically correct films and whether it is possible to deal with such a delicate theme from a temporal distance without making a strong political statement at the same time.

In a similar fashion, Oleg Novkovic's film *Say Why You Left Me* (*Kazi zasto me ostavi*, 1993) use the town of Vukovar as a symbol of destruction. Novkovic explores

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<sup>60</sup> See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 141-143.

the interconnection between external and personal destruction, painting a story of people whose lives were irreversibly changed by the war. The story focuses on a young man who ends up on the Vukovar front. This experience changes him to the extent that even a love with a girl, who also went through the horrors of the war, is not sufficient to erase the final impacts of the destruction around them. Their devastating experience alienates them from the outside world which is finally and inevitably lost for them.

Besides these two films, another film that depicted Vukovar's tragedy was a film of *Black Wave* director Zivojin Pavlovic. *Deserter* (*Dezerter*, Zivojin Pavlovic, 1992), filmed in Belgrade and Vukovar, was considered as one of the most “moving films that came out of Yugoslav wars.”<sup>61</sup> The film based on Dostoevsky's short story, deals with theme of destroyed friendships, love and deception in the light of the civil war. Pavlovic provides a strong cinematic picture of destruction and death. Being one of the most devastated cities in the Yugoslav conflict, Vukovar in films became a metaphor for destruction and death itself. Due to its tragedy, the city of Vukovar which together with Sarajevo and Srebrenica became a symbol of crimes, civilian suffering and complete destruction, became one of the most cinematically exploited sites. The ruins of Vukovar had two significances, of physical destruction and the destruction of personal lives of people of Yugoslavia. The transmission of the first into the symbolism of the second appeared to be hard, since the tragedy of Vukovar was still a real and painful experience for its citizens. Therefore it is not surprising that reactions were diverse and negative, as in Draskovic's case, and that the metaphor for equal suffering in the war was not appropriate, since in reality the aggression on Vukovar was preformed on Milosevic's instructions. The problem of these films, as perceived by some critics, was in their lack of direct message against Milosevic's politics.

The Yugoslav war remained one of the main topics in the cinema of the 1990s. One of the films that caused the greatest controversy and was at the same time

<sup>61</sup> The film was not available to foreign audience due to the economic embargo.

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117908263.html?categoryid=31&cs=1>; Last accessed 26/07/2008

internationally successful was a film made by famous, and no less controversial, ex-Yugoslav director Emir Kusturica: *Underground* (*Podzemlje*, France, Yugoslavia, Germany, Hungary, 1995).<sup>62</sup> In this film Kusturica provided his own view of the Yugoslav break up, contemplating historical events from the Second World War to the 1990s. The majority of the main characters dwell in a cellar, an underground, which became a metaphor for the ideological blindness of Tito's time. The film starts with the Second World War and ends with the break up of Yugoslavia. The events take place in the years, 1941, 1961, and 1990. It is a story of friendship between two men, communists, and their love for the same woman, Natalia, which overlaps with historical events in Yugoslavia. At the very beginning of the film, one of the two friends, Crni, hides from Germans with a group of people in the cellar. Their only connection with the outside world is through Marko, who after getting rid of his rival Crni, marries Natalia and gets a high position in Tito's party. In the mean time, the people in the underground live their lives convinced that the Second World War is still going on. After they finally break out from the cellar, they learn the truth, but this is not the end of the tragic events, as Crni loses his son on this occasion. The end is set in the 1990s, when the civil war started in which all three characters took part. Their final reunion ends in bloodshed. In the last scene all the protagonists are taken on the piece of land down the river Danube, which symbolizes the end of Yugoslavia.

This imaginative story with symbolic meanings brought international attention to Kusturica, while the music from the film, composed by Goran Bregovic became internationally popular. The extent to which this *vox populi* celebration of the war, such as in the song like *Kalashnikov*, is a separate matter for discussion. This song

<sup>62</sup> The fact that he never appealed openly against the war in Bosnia, contributed to the controversy around this director as did his political attitudes. Kusturica, originally a Bosnian Muslim raised in a socialist-atheist system, was a few years ago baptized in the Orthodox Church in Serbia which he recognized as a returning to his roots. In spite of this he also declares himself as an anti-globalist. In Film Festival, which he started in the town of Mokra gora in Serbia, Kusturica performed 'funeral' of the film *Die Hard 2*, which was his 'symbolic' homage to Hollywood commercial films. In recent demonstrations against Kosovo independence held on 21 February 2008 in Belgrade, Emir Kusturica in his speech reminded Serbs of the importance of the *Kosovo Myth* and belonging to a "heavenly nation." See Skrozza, Tamara: *Portret savremenika-Emir Kusturica: Gazda od Drvenograda*, Vreme 856, <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=500496>, also: [www.politika.co.yu/rubrike/Politika/RECH-JE-DATA-DOK-ZIVIMO-KOSOVO-JE-SRBIJA.lt.html](http://www.politika.co.yu/rubrike/Politika/RECH-JE-DATA-DOK-ZIVIMO-KOSOVO-JE-SRBIJA.lt.html)



creates a cultural stereotype of Balkans people as inevitably irrational, but the extent to which foreign audiences recognize this music as such is debatable.

Kusturica's view on the break-up of Yugoslavia includes reinterpretation of recent Yugoslav history. Although the film received Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1995, it caused diverse reactions and received a lot of criticism. Besides the disappointment with Kusturica by his fellow Sarajevo citizens for his ignorance of the suffering in Bosnia, the film raised many issues.<sup>63</sup> There are problems in the debates around this film that are worth noting here. The film not only dealt with the communist system of Tito's era, which the people in the cellar represent, but also from the very beginning it problematized the whole Yugoslav history. This stance that even the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as a union of South Slavs was an artificial state is signified in the opening sequence where it is shown that while Belgrade was bombed by Nazis, Zagreb and Maribor for example are celebrating the arrival of the Nazi troops. The causes of Yugoslavia's collapse in the 1990s, as the film suggests, are to be found in 1918. On the other hand the Serbs are portrayed as anti-fascists, devoted to Tito's ideology, who as we see from the opening scene suffered the most from Germans in World War II, for their anti-fascism. These ideas express the cultural matrix of the 1990s and certainly they are one of the reasons why Kusturica's film remained highly controversial for both former Yugoslav and foreign viewers.

Contemplations on Yugoslav history were strongly represented in other films as well, and some of them will be discussed later. The aforementioned comedy *Tito and I*, is one of the films where the director provides an insight into some of the controversies on Yugoslavia. Markovic gives just a hint of the darker side of Tito's state, through the representation of secret services, Goli Otok camp for political prisoners, or portraying in a comical way the hidden anti-Titoism not only among the members of the family of the main character but also in Tito's birthplace Zagorje. At the time when this film was made, which was just at the dawn of the Yugoslav wars, the

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63 Dina Iordanova devoted a significant part of her book to this director and discussed the main problems related to *Underground*, from the main theme of the film, its message, interpretation, different critiques to the production affairs. See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 122.

political climate was suitable for questioning Tito as a leader and the Yugoslav state in general. Yugoslav history was reinterpreted and became one of the motifs in a number of Serbian films, including the selected films for my case study. The preoccupation with historical themes and formation of pseudo history is also one of the phenomenons of the late 1980s and the 1990s, which was depicted in the films such as *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* that will be analysed in the next chapter. I will discuss this subject further as a part of my analysis of the films, because the cinematic representation of history also connects to the representation of the ideology of the 1990s.

Zelimir Zilnik, a *Black Wave* director, in his provocative *Marble Ass* (*Dupe od mramora*, 1995) through the story of marginalized groups investigates a masculinity myth, the myth that was popularized through Milosevic's media. Zilnik as an “outspoken critic of nationalism”<sup>64</sup> previously made a comedy, half-documentary, *Tito among the Serbs for the Second Time* (*Tito po drugi put medju Srbima*, 1993) where he satirically deals with the impacts of the lost father-icon of Tito, and Serbs' perception of Tito's image. Zilnik, who later dealt with the problem of immigrants and their life on the borders of Europe, in both of his films explores and subverts iconic images, the cult of the leader, typical of communist systems, and the cult of the warrior.

Zivojin Pavlovic's last film *The State of the Dead* (*Drzava mrtvih*, 2002) whose filming started in 1997, waited for several years for its final release, as the director died in 1998. The film was completed by Dinko Tucakovic, director, film theorist and critic who tried to finish the film in such a way that his work would remain “invisible” and preserve Pavlovic's personal touch.<sup>65</sup> Pavlovic in *The State of the Dead* speaks both about the war and Serbian society. In fact his film shows these two problems, often disconnected in other films, as one: the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the war have irreversible consequences in Serbian society. The film is based on

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64 Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 96.

65 Georgijev, Slobodan: *Premijera- Drzava mrtvih Zike Pavlovica: Temkovi, blato i bol*, *Vreme* 622, <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=328682>

the drama of Sinisa Kovacevic, *Janez*, and follows the story of a Slovenian Yugoslav army officer and his family who, after the war started in Slovenia, ends up in Belgrade's refugee centre for Yugoslav army officers from former republics, which was common at the time. The break-up of the family starts when the son takes to organized crime, the mother has attacks of insanity and a father who faced with a low family income is forced to give up of his officer's honour and accept the humiliating position of door-keeper in a club owned by local criminals. Pavlovic connects the escalation of the war and criminalization of society to nationalist hysteria of the 1990s. In the next section I will discuss the film *Premeditated Murder* (Ubistvo s predumisljajem, Gorcin Stojanovic, 1996), that although it is recognized as belonging to the genre of melodrama, also provided a significant insight into the impact of ideologies on Serbian society and their role in the conflicts.

#### 4.3.5. Framing the Ideologies: *Premeditated Murder*

One film that draws attention to ideological clashes within Serbian society and points to national ideology as one of the reasons for the conflict of the 1990s, was Gorcin Stojanovic's *Premeditated Murder*(1996).<sup>66</sup> *Premeditated Murder* is a film that like other films of its time dealt with recent Yugoslav history and reconnected it to the conflict of the 1990s. In that sense the film tried to discuss the political ideology of the 1940s by showing the post World War II events in Tito's Yugoslavia. As discussed in Chapter 3, Tito's Yugoslavia was strongly criticized in the late 1980s, by Milosevic's political apparatus, primarily the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and by Church representatives.<sup>67</sup> However, the film only depicts the ideological clashes after the establishment of Tito's Yugoslavia rather than trying to provide political answers.

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<sup>66</sup> The film was an independent production by the company Cinema Design whose founder Ljubisa Samardzic is the main producer of the film. Similarly to previous films, *Premeditated Murder* besides receiving financial help from independent sponsors, also received support from institutions such as the Ministry of Culture of Serbia, Avala film and Radio Television of Serbia, with participation of the Bulgarian National Television.

<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 3.

#### 4.3.5. (A) Plot

The film is based on a novel written by Slobodan Selenic, a famous Serbian writer and novelist, who also wrote a screenplay for the film. Selenic framed the ideological discourses of communist fatalism of the 1940s and nationalism of the 1990s, stressing their impacts on the life of ordinary people in extraordinary times. *Premeditated Murder* is a film that integrates two stories, set in the 1940s and 1990s, which put together in one coherent piece tell a story about the circle of the wars in the Balkans, the ideologies that drove them and the impacts they had on the people. The main narrative is set in Belgrade in 1992, the year of student anti-regime protests. A girl named Jelena finds in a park the soldier Bogdan, a Croatian Serb who was wounded in the battlefield and for whom there was no place in the hospital. She takes him from the street to her house. Bogdan is recovering at Jelena's house, helping her to write a story about her grandmother Jeja based on her old diary. Jelena and Bogdan fall in love but the tragedy starts when Bogdan decides to return to the battlefield. His decision is mainly a result of pressure from one of Milosevic's war profiteers. Bogdan dies on the battlefield and Jelena finds his body and buries him in Belgrade in her family tomb, next to her grandmother Jeja. At Bogdan's funeral in Belgrade she gives to her friend, a potential publisher, a completed book about her grandmother, as she promised to Bogdan she would do. In response to her friend's questioning about the end of the book she replies that there is no end. The tragic circle however is ended and broken at the same time with Jelena's decision to leave Belgrade and move to New Zealand.

The story of Jelena's grandmother is told through flashbacks and connects to the main plot of the film. Her grandmother Jeja is portrayed as a wealthy and educated young woman from a bourgeois family. In the new communist system established after the Second World War there was no place for the bourgeois class who were recognized as anti-communist and the collaborators of Germans. Their property was taken and they ended up in prisons or being executed. Jeja's step-father is one of these political enemies, also called 'class enemies' of the new system. The only way

for Jeja to save the family house is to collaborate with communists and their powerful leader Krsman, who has strong affections for her. Her ill step-brother Jovan with whom Jeja had a love affair refuses this. Their story has a tragic outcome, Jovan kills Krsman and commits suicide, while Jeja soon dies after giving birth to Jelena's mother.

#### 4.3.5. (B) Depiction of the Ideology of “The People”

The story of Jelena's grandmother throws light on the historical events after the Second World War, while the main story about Jelena and Bogdan provides a picture of Milosevic's Serbia and the civil war. Yet both stories make one coherent piece about ideology. The film investigates the most recent history by depicting the ideologies that shaped it. The main conflict however is not described through the depiction of the war between Serbs and Croats, but through the cultural and ideological clash within Serbian society. The film paints the conflict of the so-called liberal, pro-Western view versus the people's ideologies, or what is also known as the conflict between urban and non urban cultural space.<sup>68</sup> These different political options of Serbia are in the centre of the conflict, which in the end results in the concrete explosion of violence, political persecution and war. Therefore the representation of the 1940s in the film should not be read as a consequence of the director's embrace of the ideological concepts of the late 1980s. Rather the film is stating that whatever was done in Serbia “in the name of the people”, in the revolution of the 1940s or in the populist politics of the 1990s, resulted in atrocities and suffering of the people, in whose name both ideologies were conceived. *Premeditated Murder* depicts this long clash that existed in Serbia between these two opposite political ideas. Although the concept of the people's ideology varied depending on the context of the time, some common ground can be identified, for example the rejection of so called pro-Western concepts of the democratic state. The film depicts the polarization of Serbia on two ideologically and politically opposed ideas. The first one veres more towards the modern concept of the state while the

<sup>68</sup> The ideological concept of a people's-national state versus the liberal concept is discussed in Chapter 3.

second gravitates towards the people's state which is embodied first in socialism, and later in the re-introduced concept of a national state whose ideological principle is based on "God-king(ruler)-householder."<sup>69</sup> Both principles embody a strong idea of collectivism, which had dominated as a political issue for the whole century.<sup>70</sup>

*The people* is a Slavic term that was commonly exploited in both ideological contexts. In the film this term has a negative connotation. The term *the people* as we see in the film stands for a hegemonic mass with a collective identity rather than a community of individuals. It was also a term commonly used in the former socialist Yugoslavia which was defined as a community of people based on "equality, brotherhood and fraternity." All political actions were usually done "in the name of *the people*", and for example all courtroom verdicts would start with this phrase. In the 1990s the concept of *the people* was used in the same fashion, to justify political actions as a result of *the people's* will.

Unlike in the 1940s, when *the people* referred to all nations living in socialist Yugoslavia, in the 1990s the term was now used to indicate primarily the Serbian nation. For example, Milosevic's media machinery described the gathering of Serbs in Kosovo in 1989, as an event of *the people*.<sup>71</sup> In this context Serbian people are described as one entity, and consequently from this populist concept of *the people* phrases such as *narodna dusa* (the people's soul) or *narodna mudrost* (the people's wisdom) emerged into the public discourse.

Krsman's character represents what was understood by the term *the people* in the early days of socialist Yugoslavia, primarily Marxists or partisans. Krsman is an uneducated peasant from Kopaonik, whose only guarantee for rising on the social

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<sup>69</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>70</sup> The idea of collectivism, as discussed in chapter 3, was opposed to the 'western' concept of individualism. Collectivism as an idea was often connected to the Orthodox religion. As Latinka Perovic argued, Orthodoxy was not interested in the accumulation of capital, classifying work as the instrument for the satisfaction of basic needs, which was closer to the concept of socialism than capitalism. See Perovic, Latinka: *Izmedju anarhije i autokratije: srpsko drustvo na prelazima vekova (XIX-XXI)*, Beograd: Helsinski odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Ogledi Br. 8, 2006, p. 24.

<sup>71</sup> See chapter 3.

scale is in belonging to the communist party. One of the characters describes these young revolutionaries, such as Krsman, as people from whose eyes were shining “a kind of unmerciful justice.” People are also described as bandits and unrefined mass: “They kill their old fathers with shovels...they will kill for a plum...they will pick out the eye of a brother for Marxism, they will plough the Belgrade streets to remind them of their home...they respect cows more than women because cows are stronger and cheaper... they sing like wolves...they fart in Church...”<sup>72</sup>

The concrete results of this “people's will” are shown in the brutality of Krsman's character, and in the atmosphere of political proscription and imprisonment of all opponents to the new system.

#### 4.3.5. (C) Depiction of the Ideological Context of the 1990s

The main protagonists of the 1990s story, Jelena and Bogdan, reflect the ideological conflicts of their time. Jelena's character represents the pacifist, pro-Western youth of Belgrade as opposed to *the people*, who are embodied in Bogdan's character. Bogdan is portrayed as a naïve Serbian soldier from Croatia who is convinced that he is protecting his land by participating in the war, but whose patriotism vanishes at the end when he admits all the futility and absurdity of the civil war. Bogdan is shown to be affected by the populist political ideology, he believes in the idea of a “heavenly nation”<sup>73</sup> and therefore does not question the rightfulness or reasons of the war. Jelena on the other hand challenges his beliefs, to the point when Bogdan starts to question it. Although Bogdan expresses criticism towards hardcore nationalist Muzdeka, his neighbour and a war profiteer, he is nevertheless incapable of resisting these ideas completely and he returns to the battlefield. Bogdan's character represents *the people* in the context of the 1990s and he is a metaphor for the population who believed in the concept of a national state embodied in Milosevic's populist discourse, and due to this he was manipulated. This problem is revealed through his conversations with Jelena, when Bogdan continuously refers to Serbs as “our people.” Bogdan, coming from a rural area also reflects the so-called traditional

<sup>72</sup> DVD “Ubistvo s predumisljajem”, Beograd: First Production, 2005.

<sup>73</sup> See chapter 3.

values, such as chastity and naivety, virtues that were supposed preserved by the people and within the Serbian nation. In this sense Bogdan's character does not subvert the image of the Serbian warrior as honorable defender. The subversion of this image is given through the portrayal of Bogdan's neighbour, Muzdeka, which will be discussed later. Bogdan is at the same time shown as a victim of this political discourse, which suggests that the people, in whose name the war was waged, were ultimately the victims of populist and pro-war politics of the regime.

As previously discussed the problems of cultural differences and clashes within Serbian society are shown through the representation of the clash between the so-called *people's option* (my italics) versus a liberal concept of society. In the 1940s we see this through the clash of Jeja's family with partisans, while in the 1990s this problem is revealed through the relationship of Jelena and Bogdan. Jeja in the 1940s, being from the bourgeois family, stands as a metaphor for Western capitalism, individualism and against the form of collectivism embodied in communist ideology. Jelena of the 1990s, represents the so called urban youth who have no interest in national mythologies. Jelena as a pacifist who strongly opposes nationalism, reflects more the internationalist, cosmopolitan spirit. In contrast, Bogdan represents *the people* whose convictions are shaped by populist ideology. He is portrayed as a Serb nationalist, who although he admits that "there are good Croats" is nevertheless unable to completely overcome his ideological beliefs and embrace Jelena's urbanity and pacifism.

Muzdeka, Bogdan's neighbour and a war profiteer, on the other hand represents a hard core nationalist who has an interest in the war. Nationalist ideology is a folding-screen for his criminal activities. Muzdeka expresses nationalism through hate for all Croats. He is portrayed as an uneducated, rough person of rural background, and he is similar to some extent to the aforementioned image of *the people* represented in Krsman, who are described as "wolves." Muzdeka does not speak English and he hates Jelena's sophisticated urbanity and Belgrade as such. In the the 1990s Belgrade was commonly pictured as a city that betrayed national interests, whose youth had



more or less no interest in the war and who were influenced by the Western ideas. Belgrade as one of the biggest cultural and political centres, both of former Yugoslavia and Serbia, was nevertheless accused of gravitating more towards pro-Western ideas than being a real capital of the Serbian nation. The film points out these problems and cultural divisions.

One element of the film that portrays this cultural and ideological clash is music. The music in the film is used to reflect this existing confrontation between two streams and ideas, traditional, which in this context connects to nationalism, and modern which connects to liberalism, and which also has an anti-war connotation. In the two previously analysed films, we saw how music had a function to show a shift towards nationalism, with the emergence of so called patriotic folk songs in the 1990s public sphere. The mythological concepts of nationhood and war, that emerged through music, included also a return to traditional Serbian instruments, such as the *gusle*.<sup>74</sup> The sound of the *gusle* appears in the opening scene of *Premeditated Murder*, which shows wounded Serbian soldiers from Croatia in Belgrade's hospital. The *Gusle* has the function of portraying the mythological concept of the war popularized through the nationalist-religious ideology. In this sense the music not only contributes to “realize the meaning of the film” but also represents an autonomous statement and illustrates the political convictions of the characters.

*Gusle* are contrasted to the rock sounds of the Belgrade punk rock band, who in 1992 made a song “Peace, brother”, that was used in the student protests as the film shows. The song starts with a verse: “We don't want folk music to win”, which refers to the dominant turbo-folk music promoted by the regime media.<sup>75</sup> The urban sound in the film represents the Belgrade pacifist youth, who opposed Milosevic. The song represents an anti war statement while the *gusle* in this context represents a call to

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<sup>74</sup> This instrument was traditionally used in oral tradition for storytelling. Stories coexisted from very long texts about heroes from the Serbian distant historical past and described various historical or mythical events connected to figures from Serbian culture. They were commonly sung during the Ottoman slavery. The return to this instrument marked a return to Serbian tradition that gave participants a sense of contributing to a form of mythological battle for Serbdom, Orthodoxy and all other ideas that at that time were understood as determinative for Serbian identity.

<sup>75</sup> See chapter 4.

war. These two different types of music in the film suggest the separation of Serbs into two groups, those who supported Milosevic and those who opposed him.

The film makes reference to nationalist-religious ideology as the basis of the pro-war discourse. The portrayal of the nationalism of some of the characters, such as Muzdeka, shows that nationalism was in the roots of Milosevic's politics and was used to justify the war in Croatia, that is shown as very profitable for the regime. Information about the ideological discourse of the 1990s is nevertheless given through the opponents of the regime. Bogdan does not say a single word about his beliefs but the director gives us a hint about his convictions through his arguments with Jelena. He quietly disapproves of Jelena's attacks on the *Kosovo Myth* and the image of Saint Lazarus.<sup>76</sup> The connection of the idea of nationhood to the Orthodox religion is also shown in the scene in which Bogdan is listening to a tape with the Divine Liturgy that he switches off before Jelena enters the room. Nonetheless Bogdan is not stereotyped as a complete outsider; rather he is a former student who also shows appreciation for some Western goods. He is thrilled for example when Jelena gives him a pair of "converse sneakers" as a gift.

However, Bogdan's identity and beliefs are significantly shaped by the nationalist-religious ideology of the time. Bogdan declares himself as a Serb first and foremost, which is shown in the opening scene, when replying to Muzdeka's question on his return to the battlefield, Bogdan states: "you will not teach me, you are not a bigger Serb than me." This sentence introduces Bogdan from the beginning of the story as a person who believes in the concept of nationhood as introduced in the early 1990s. The whole scene is followed by the sound of the *gusle* in the background, the instrument used for patriotic epic songs, to illustrate this new modern patriotism.

The part of the film set in the 1990s provides a political criticism of the Milosevic era. It shows the corruption in the health service, sanctions and economic crisis that

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76 "Jelena: Screw heavenly people and Tzar Lazar...,

Bogdan: Jelena! What are you saying?"

DVD "Ubistvo s predumisljajem", Beograd: First Production, 2005.

result from his rule. Depiction of war as a site of death and destruction but also of profit provide a picture of Serbian moral, social, political and cultural erosion that came as a consequence of embracing the regime's politics. The depiction of war profiteers subverts the image of the civil war as a just war. The representation of the ideological concept of the 1990s shows that the nationalist-religious ideology was used for justification of atrocities.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have surveyed a large number of Serbian films produced during the 1990s and focused upon several specific films. I narrowed down my discussion by categorizing films according to the themes that prevailed in the film narratives: the war, violence and ideology. I explored different perspectives that the film directors offered upon these issues. I argued that the Serbian cinema of the 1990s was politically engaged cinema which provided critical perspectives on the Yugoslav crisis and the Milosevic regime.

The ambiguity of films allows different readings and different perspectives on the cinema of the 1990s. For this reason and as a part of my discussion I offered different perspectives and readings of film scholars on certain Serbian films. What was commonly criticized in the films which dealt with specifically war themes can be summarized in the words of Nevena Dakovic who said that the films represented the war as a “chronicle of announced death which inflects linear time of reality into the mythical circle.”<sup>77</sup> This means that Serbian films offered a stereotypical portrayal of the Balkan people as destined for conflict, rather than a depiction of the war as a result of concrete policies. One of the reasons for such a view can be found in the cinematic reinterpretation of recent Yugoslav history in the war films. The perception of the Yugoslav state as a false state was, as in Kusturica's case, often connected to the escalation the war. Nevena Dakovic discussed “cinematic

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<sup>77</sup> Dakovic, Nevena: *Yugoslav wars: Between Myth and Reality*, <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/mpi/Activities/Media%20Practice%20Spring%202002/dakovic.htm>, approached: 16/07/2008. My translation.

explanation of the wars”, and put these explanations into two categories, “historic-critical and mythical-fatalist.”<sup>78</sup> Tito's time, was in this sense as Dakovic further argues, the “epoch of frustrating suppression of national identities” that led to the escalation of nationalism in the 1990s.<sup>79</sup> This mythical concept applied in film texts provided “the mythical image of war – as a force of destiny or unavoidable evil to come.”<sup>80</sup> In this way the Yugoslav conflict becomes a part of the cycle of “eternal Balkans conflicts.”<sup>81</sup> One of the possible reasons for mythical representation of the wars and thus stereotypical portrayals of the wild Balkan man, according to some critics such as Tomislav Longinovic, can be found in the prehistory of Serbian film. In other words, it was a result of “Hollywoodization of Yugoslav cinema” that took place in the 1970s and that influenced later directors. In this way Yugoslav cinema was “doubly colonized”, meaning that the domestic filmmakers incorporated the so-called Western gaze into their film making.<sup>82</sup>

Some scholars argued that the absence of a direct portrayal of the regime does not necessarily mean that the films observed violence as an isolated phenomenon. On the contrary as Bjelic argued: the shift from local to global provides an insight into ethnic conflict as a classless conflict which he recognizes as a process of fragmentation and thus globalization of the Balkans.

In the first part of this chapter I discussed the cinematic traditions that existed in Yugoslav cinema and that influenced later directors. I discussed the *Black Wave* movement because of the particular importance that this movement had and its engagement with social and political themes which remained a characteristic of the

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78 Dakovic, Nevena: *Kinematografija raspada Jugoslavije: plamen na nicijoj zemlji*, <http://www.filg.uj.edu.pl/~wwwip/postjugo/files/262/raspad-u-filmu.pdf>, p.3., Last accessed: 16/07/2008. My translation.

79 Dakovic, Nevena: *Ibid*, Last accessed: 16/07/2008. My translation.

80 Dakovic, Nevena: *Yugoslav wars: Between Myth and Reality*, <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/mpi/Activities/Media%20Practice%20Spring%202002/dakovic.htm>. Last accessed: 16/07/2008.

81 See Dakovic, Nevena: *Kinematografija raspada Jugoslavije: plamen na nicijoj zemlji*, <http://www.filg.uj.edu.pl/~wwwip/postjugo/files/262/raspad-u-filmu.pdf>, p.6, Last accessed: 16/07/2008. My translation.

82 See Longinovic, Tomislav: *Ibid*, 2005.

films of the 1990s. The films of the *Black Wave* provided socio-political criticism that scholars such as Bjelic recognized as “resistance.”<sup>83</sup> What is important is to acknowledge the distinction between resistance and subversiveness in film, as Bjelic discussed. The difference is to be found in “national and global aesthetics.”<sup>84</sup> Global aesthetics that Bjelic finds in the films of the 1990s is in adoption of “Hollywood stereotypes” in filmmaking style that according to Frederick Jameson turned Serbian national cinema into a “global cinema.”<sup>85</sup> Global cinema provides criticism, by “adopting Hollywood stereotypes and aesthetic codes precisely in order to subvert them.”<sup>86</sup> In this sense Bjelic defines Serbian cinema of the 1990s as subversive cinema. This cinema “inherited Hollywoodization of domestic ideology that typified in the 1970s, and deployed the stereotype of the wild Balkan man, and ideological and global media cliché of the 1990s, in order to confront both nationalism and globalism at once.”<sup>87</sup>

In Serbian films of the 1990s we find influences of the tradition of the *Black Wave's* socio-political criticism, but also influences of Hollywood cinema, with strong elements of black humor that developed in the 1980s. Films of the 1990s represent politically engaged cinema that explored the socio-political reality of their time. Many films of the 1990s which dealt with specific themes, such as violence, represented it as the consequence of the ideological context of the 1990s. *Keg of Gunpowder* is not only a film about violence, it is a film about the Yugoslav war and the Serbian regime. An absence of portrayal of the war, and an absence of direct message against the Milosevic regime does not mean that the film does not point to these problems. In fact the film speaks about violence in a local context and as a direct consequence of the war and the regime. In this regard I suggested that when we speak about Serbian films of the 1990s we cannot speak about some uniform cinematic representation of the conflict as a “global human tragedy”<sup>88</sup>, but rather we

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83 Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 105.

84 See Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 104-105.

85 Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 104.

86 Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 104.

87 Bjelic, Dusan: *Ibid*, p. 105.

88 Dakovic, Nevena: *Ibid*, Last accessed: 23/09/2008.

need to look more carefully into the issues that each of these films discussed.

It is important to say, for the sake of contextualizing Serbian cinema, that outside the world of cinema, as well as within the Serbian cultural milieu there existed strong criticism of the nationalist-religious ideology.<sup>89</sup> The films never provided direct criticism as Biljana Srbljanovic for example did in her drama *The Fall (Pad, 1999)*.<sup>90</sup> However films such as *Pretty Village Pretty Flame* or *Wounds* did offer a significant religious symbolism whose function will be explored in the next chapters. The interconnection of these symbols to violence, crime and war can certainly inform us to a significant extent about the ideological discourse of the 1990s and religion as an inseparable part of this discourse. The mythological concept of Yugoslav disintegration in the 1990s, which was discussed by scholars such as Jameson, Iordanova, or Dakovic, is a subject to be investigated further as a part of my exploration of the representation of local mythologies embodied in Orthodoxy and Serbdom.

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89 Criticism of Milosevic's politics and his ideology was present in the Serbian public sphere. One of the greatest critics of Milosevic among intellectuals from the "world of arts" was the Serbian playwright Biljana Srbljanovic. In her play *Pad (The Fall, Biljana Srbljanovic, 1998)* she criticized religious ideology that prevailed in Serbia and was strongly bonded to nationalism and the official regime's political ideology. In her play Srbljanovic made a parallel with bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, whose theology was reapplied in the 1990s for the purposes of the justification of the war. Nikolaj Velimirovic and his work are discussed in chapter 3.

90 See chapter 3.

## Chapter 5

### *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*

#### 5.0. Introduction

In this chapter I analyze the film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (*Lepa sela lepo gore*, 1995) by Srdjan Dragojevic. I focus on the cinematic representation of the nationalist-religious ideology of the Milosevic regime. My intention is to explore the extent to which the film informs us about the ideology, religion and nationalism of the 1990s and whether these representations are subversive. In the first part of this chapter, 5.1., I discuss the genre, the background of the film and the plot. The second part of this chapter, 5.2., is devoted to the critical reception of the film. The film provoked vigorous debates, and I summarize the main issues which both Serbian and foreign scholars and critics identified in the film. The next two sections are devoted to film analysis. In section 5.3. I analyze the main characters in the film within the specific socio-political and cultural context of the 1990s. In section 5.4. I look at the cinematic representation of nationalism and religious ideology in the film. My analysis is divided into five parts. In the first one I discuss the religiosity of the main characters and its connection to the rise of national tensions. Next I analyze the cinematic representation of religious images and national symbols and their meaning in the context of the film. My aim is to look at how these representations inform us about the cultural iconography of the 1990s and its political implications. Then I discuss the emergence of mythological language into everyday life, its function and role in raising national tensions. I then focus on the representation of media propaganda in the film. In the last part of this section and in order to discuss how the nationalist-religious ideology shaped the perception of *others* (my italics) I look at how the film depicts other nationalities and what this depiction says about the Serbian characters in the film. The last part of this chapter, 5.4., is devoted to the conclusion, in which I discuss the results of my analysis.

The film is based upon a true story that first came out as an article in the newspapers. The film was made in the year 1995 by an independent group of artists gathered around “Cobra film”, who decided to “fight the destruction around them through art.”<sup>1</sup> This film became the most viewed film in the territory of former Yugoslavia at the time, and has received seven Grand-Prix awards.<sup>2</sup> As we will see later, the debates on this film were diverse, and opinions were divided. I chose this film because of its unique depiction of the ideology of the 1990s. The film informs about the interconnection between the war in Bosnia and the ideological discourse of the Serbian regime.

### **5.1. *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame (Lepa sela, lepo gore, Srdjan Dragojevic, 1995)***

This section includes same background information about the film. First I discuss the genre; second, I give a brief insight into how the film was made: where the initial idea for the film came from and how it was produced; and third, I outline the plot.

#### **5.1.1. Genre**

For further discussion on this film it is important first of all to identify its genre. *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* belongs to the so-called war-genre films. Since it was described by some critics as a war propaganda film, it is particularly important to identify the genre, or rather its *sub-genre* (my italics) before discussing the film further. The definition on this film as a war-genre film is not sufficient, especially because some critics, as will be discussed later, found this film to be a pro-war film.

Diverse and divided opinions about this film show that we need to identify more

1 “This is the biggest independent project in the history of the Yugoslav film industry. It was made in a country that has a hundred times less theatres than restaurants. At the moment it seems that culture in Serbia is definitely an item from the past. The communist regime (The Milosevic regime, my objection) channeled money into war activities, and film and theatre were in their darkest period... Abandoned by the official institutions, artists gathered around “Cobra” decided to take matters into their own hands.”

DVD *Pretty Village Pretty Flame*, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.

2 The film was also the Serbian candidate for the Oscar in 1997. The film has been distributed in over forty countries by a French Company Canal +. DVD *Pretty Village Pretty Flame*, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.



themes in the film. Gaye Ortiz suggested that war-genre films should be analyzed according to their specific themes and she proposed eight categories: “the ethics of killing, patriotism, dehumanization of war, post-9/11 reality/terrorism, torture and detention, desire/conditions for peace and non-violence, the economy of war and anti-war black comedy.”<sup>3</sup> Ortiz’ definitions were a useful guide for this research on *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* and definition of its sub-genre. In this chapter I argue that this film is an anti-war black comedy, in which subversive representation of the nationalist-religious ideology is to be explored. How the film deals with the themes of “patriotism” and “the ethics of killing” in order to subvert the ideological context of the 1990s will be investigated further in this chapter. As we will see further, the film depicts Serbian patriotism as an aggressive nationalism while the ethics of killing for example is explored through the subversive representation of the idea of the Serbian war as just war. A detailed analysis of the film will contribute to a better understanding of the importance of identifying the film's sub-themes for the fuller definition of the genre. It is also clear that the identifying of the film's sub-text contributes to the further exploration of cinematic subversiveness.

#### 5.1.2. Making the Film

The story was first published in the newspapers and caught the attention of Vanja Bulic, a journalist of the magazine *Duga*<sup>4</sup> who then wrote a novel *The Tunnel*, which was strongly criticized by scholars such as Ivan Colovic, as a “pro-war propagandist novel.”<sup>5</sup> However as Dragojevic stated he was attracted to the story of soldiers set in a “claustrophobic situation” seeing it as good way to tell the war story.<sup>6</sup> The film script had fourteen versions and the original text of the *Tunnel* was changed almost completely.<sup>7</sup>

3 Deacy, Christopher and Ortiz, Gaye: *Theology and Film: Challenging the Sacred/Secular Divide*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, p. 162.

4 *Duga* was one of the magazines close to the Milosevic regime. See Iordanova Dina: *Cinema of Flames*, London: British Film Institute, 2001, p. 143.

5 Colovic, Ivan: *Politika simbola*, Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2002, p. 231.

6 Teofil Pancic and Ana Uzelac: *Interview Srdjan Dragojevic: Shame, Anger, and Then – Nothing*, July 20, 1996, Vreme News Digest Agency No 250, [http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/serbian\\_digest/250/t250-8.htm](http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/serbian_digest/250/t250-8.htm); Last accessed: 15/01/2009.

7 Teofil Pancic and Ana Uzelac: *Ibid.*

Funds for the film were raised from different sources, Radio Television of Serbia, the Serbian Ministry of Culture, but also from a number of state firms such as the Belgrade Public Transport Bureau. Dragojevic did not hesitate to approach politicians, from Seselj and Radovan Karadzic to Zoran Djindjic.<sup>8</sup> Radovan Karadzic's help was turned down mostly due to the vice-president of Republika Srpska, Nikola Koljevic, who saw the film as anti-Serbian and wanted to interfere and change parts of the script.<sup>9</sup>

Because of a lack of finances the shooting of the film was stopped several times. The state co-financed the whole project, and the Ministry of Culture gave the film a budget of "around 100,000 Deutsch marks, the same amount that was given to some other projects that year."<sup>10</sup> A great advantage, Dragojevic says, was "the private connection of the main actor with the director of Television of Serbia, Milorad Vucelic."<sup>11</sup> The Greek Ministry of Culture also played an important role, sending filming equipment to Republika Srpska in Bosnia to help, and later financing the post-production in Athens.<sup>12</sup> The film was completed after many interruptions and was first screened in 1996, after which it turned out to be a blockbuster, which nevertheless caused a great deal of controversy among the audience and critics, both at home and abroad. Before I turn to consider the critical reception of the film, in the next section I first discuss the plot.

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8 See Iordanova, Dina: *Cinema of Flames*, London: British Film Institute, 2001, p. 143. See also: Teofil Pancic and Ana Uzelac: *Ibid.* Both Radovan Karadzic and Vojislav Seselj are on trial for war crimes at the Hague Tribunal. Zoran Djindjic, the first democratic prime minister of Serbia, the man who led uprising in 2000 and sent Milosevic to the Hague, was assassinated in 2003 by pro-nationalist forces. Although the assassins were convicted, the political background was never investigated and therefore those who ordered Djindjic's assassination were never arrested.

9 "In one of its versions the film was supposed to end with two boys escaping together from the tunnel, away from the Ghost. They insisted that the boys can "run away together but must do so in different directions", although technically this would have been difficult to carry out. They insisted on it because such ending would demonstrate that "we must all follow our own path, and that we have nothing more to do with the other side". There were other weird demands such as to have access to all filmed material. I am glad we managed somehow to retain our independence, as otherwise we would have had censorship." Teofil Pancic and Ana Uzelac: *Ibid.*

10 Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008.)

11 Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008.)

12 Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008.)

### 5.1.3. Film Plot

At the very beginning of the film it says, “the film is dedicated to the film industry of a country that no longer exists.”<sup>13</sup> The film begins with local news from 1971 and the inauguration of the “Brotherhood and Unity tunnel” in Bosnia, which, in the words of the communist leader, “symbolizes both the path and the light of its people” (the people of Socialist Yugoslavia).<sup>14</sup> This scene, which depicts the past is in black and white. Colour film appears when a pioneer girl gives a pair of scissors to a communist leader who then cuts himself during the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Music starts and everybody dances in a circle, in a so-called Kolo Dance, that becomes faster and faster and the camera focuses on the hand of the leader covered in blood, after which comes the title sequence. The obviously symbolic meaning of the introduction presents all the nations of Yugoslavia in a circle of the war to come, which led to the shared tragedy.

The film focuses on a story of friendship between a Serbian and a Muslim boy, Milan (Dragan Bjelogrić) and Halil (Nikola Pejaković), through whose personal relationship the author tells a story of civil war. It takes place in the year 1994 when the wounded Milan lies in the military hospital in Belgrade, and in the year 1992, when the war in Bosnia started. Although the film describes the tragic event in the tunnel, where a group of Serbian soldiers was trapped and surrounded by Muslim forces, it also shows all the horror of war and the tragedy of broken bonds between former neighbours and friends. The title *Lepa sela, lepo gore* that originally means “pretty villages burn nicely” comes from the comment of one of the characters, a Serbian soldier, after he and others have set a Muslim village on fire.

The story starts with Milan's transport to the military hospital in Belgrade, in 1994, and then shifts to the first day of the war in Bosnia few years earlier, and the scene of Milan and Halil playing basketball. To Halil's question: “Will there be a war?” Milan replies: “Sure there will be a war.” The director uses flashback interruptions to

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<sup>13</sup> DVD *Pretty Village Pretty Flame*, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> DVD *Pretty Village Pretty Flame*, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.

give us a more complete insight into their friendship but also into historical events, to express the symbolic meaning through the images, and to increase the emotional pressure while developing characters. The past and present events are interwoven throughout the whole film, mostly through Milan's memories of his and Halil's childhood, such as the year when President Tito died (1980), which symbolically represents the beginning of the end of the old Yugoslavia; their childrens' play around the tunnel, in which they believed lived "an ogre", a metaphor for evil, who if he awakes – "will set the village on fire", but also provides memories of war-time and the tunnel around which the main plot is based.

Developing the story about the war, the director introduces other characters, six of them accompanied by a woman, an American journalist, who will be trapped accidentally in the tunnel together with another six Serbs. All six characters are involved in the war in different ways and each one represents a particular mind set of the people of that time. When they run into the tunnel after a battle and have to stay there for ten days, their characters, stories and personal dramas begin to unravel. When they are in danger their relationships develop, although they are confronted by their differences, in which arise verbal conflicts that reveal their personal attitudes and life-stories, sometimes in the form of a confession (shown again through the flashbacks) and recorded by the camera of the American journalist.<sup>15</sup>

Exhausted by lack of water and their hopeless situation they all in their own ways become aware of the nonsense of the war in which they have participated, and realize that they will not survive. They are making jokes with each other and with the Muslims. Music that accentuates this moment of psychological drama is an old song of former Yugoslavia well known to both sides. At the end when they are leaving the tunnel, only Milan and the professor survive carrying a wounded friend. The American journalist gets shot at the very moment when there is hope of escape, when she tries to reach for her camera, on which she recorded the stories of her tunnel

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<sup>15</sup> They all show a lack of trust in the American journalist except Brzi, but at the end their relationship changes as she becomes a participant in the same tragedy, and shares the same destiny: she too dies.

companions. Her death signifies that there is no one left to tell the story. Milan and Halil meet at the entrance of the tunnel, the site of their childhood games and the “home of the ogre”, which they both hesitated to enter. Through their dialogue we discover that they were both convinced of the crime of the other, Halil believes that Milan burnt his house and garage, and Milan believes that Halil was responsible for the death of his mother.<sup>16</sup>

After the story of the tunnel, which ends tragically, we are again in the year 1994 in the military hospital, witnessing the climax of the plot embodied in Milan's decision. After remembering everything, Milan tries to kill a wounded Muslim soldier who is lying in the next room as war prisoner. A professor tries to stop him but ends up unconscious on the floor. After Milan finally reaches the Muslim soldier he gives up, and remains lying on the floor in a pool of blood. One of the last scenes is set again in Milan's and Halil's childhood, showing them in the tunnel in front of the bodies of victims (including themselves as adults) and then running away.

The film brings us back to the scene of Milan and Halil at the beginning, and the dialogue is repeated but to Halil's question: “Will there be the war?” Milan replies: “What war, buddy?” As their friendship is interrupted by war and forever destroyed, there is a deep sorrow painted in Milan's character as he is faced with the loss of everything he has valued in his life and at the same time with the lost values around him.

The film ends with a re-opening of the tunnel in 1999, called this time “The Tunnel of Peace”, supported and opened by European and UN officials. The ceremony is

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<sup>16</sup> Halil stands on the tunnel, Milan stands below him.

Halil: “So you went into the tunnel?”

Milan: “I did”.

Halil: “Why'd you burn our garage?”

Milan: “Why'd you slaughter my mother?”

Halil: “I didn't slaughter anyone”.

Milan: “I didn't set the garage on fire, either”.

Halil: “Who did? That Ogre from the tunnel maybe?”

Halil falls wounded by fire from a distance and before he dies he says: “What's up, Lauda?”  
(The name by which he called Milan before).

again interrupted as the man, a representative of the EU or UN cuts himself, and the film ends as the music from the beginning is repeated. The last scene has a symbolic meaning and is a bad sign. It raises the question of the possibility of reconciliation and yet at the same time, a possible escalation into a new war, which is temporally contained by the artificial community created by foreign officials. The Balkans is shown to be a place with the potential to explode, as the story of the “ogre in the tunnel” indicates, but with people who have more in common, than differences. Dragojevic holds the attention of the viewer with compressed content, combined with black humour, and music that emphasizes how the tragedy of the trapped soldiers is a metaphor for the Yugoslav war. Before turning to consider the film in detail, it is useful to analyse the mixed reception that it has received.

## **5.2. Critical Reception of the Film**

In this section I consider the major strands of critical reception, positive and negative, by Serbian and foreign critics and scholars. The critical reviews which the film received highlight its ambiguous reception. Controversy around this film opened a debate on whether a film coming from Milosevic's Serbia could possibly offer an objective perspective on the conflict. The ambiguity of the film is what created so many diverse readings, from the very positive to the very negative.<sup>17</sup> Although this ambiguity allowed the different interpretations, the reception of the film was also a political matter at the time for some critics. According to Bernd Buder, German film critic, “it was the time of hysteria in the cultural world, deeply connected with Kusturica's *Underground*, a time in which each film from Serbia had to be proved 120% anti-Serbian.”<sup>18</sup> Such a political atmosphere, especially after Sarajevo's suffering, demanded from Serbian directors clear distancing and condemnation of Milosevic's politics, which did not leave a lot of space for ambiguity and personal reflection. It is interesting that while in Bosnia the film was received in general as

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17 “The director of Viennale, the Austrian film event, refused to screen it, claiming the film was ‘Serb fascist propaganda’.” Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 146.

18 Buder, Bernd. “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire.” Personal e-mail, 19/11/2007.

pro-Serbian, some Bosnian Serbs found it not Serbian enough.<sup>19</sup>

The director describes how, after the film was screened in Serbia, he was exposed to “insults and almost physical attacks on the street” because the film was previously “strongly criticized by the so-called patriotic media.”<sup>20</sup> Dragojevic explained that the film survived and was not exposed to censorship because it came out after the Dayton agreement, at the time when the regime was trying to present itself in a different light showing the change in the political discourse in Serbia.<sup>21</sup> In spite of these claims Dragojevic was still frequently represented as a clearly Serbian director who took the pro-Serbian side in his film. There were various reasons for this, from different interpretations of the film to the production issues connected with the raising of financial support.<sup>22</sup> Dragojevic, however, proved to have been led by the principle that it is morally acceptable for a director to get money from anyone for the purpose of making this film no matter what their moral or political allegiances might be.<sup>23</sup> This is not new in the history of eastern European and Yugoslav cinematography, where during the communist period many films were financed by the state only to be banned by the same, as was the case with the *Black Wave*.

Dina Iordanova investigated this problem of extremely diverse receptions of the film, such as the one in *The Washington Post* which first took the film as pro-Serbian, later to change this attitude after getting information that the leading politicians of Bosnian Serbs such as Radovan Karadzic had boycotted the film.<sup>24</sup> According to some views, the fact that the film had a good acceptance among the U.S. audience was because it is reminiscent of so-called American style anti-war movies and

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19 Paraphrased. See Hromadzic, Hajrudin: *Nasilje u filmu kao ideoloski konstrukt*, [www.zarez.hr/73/z\\_film.htm](http://www.zarez.hr/73/z_film.htm); Last accessed: 19/09/2008.

20 Srdjan Dragojevic, “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire”, personal e-mail, 25.01.2008.

21 Paraphrased, Srdjan Dragojevic, “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire”, personal e-mail, 25/01/2008.

22 See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 143.

23 “When I am making a film I cannot think: 'I'd take money from these, but not from the other ones because they are bastards.' It is pointless to think that way if you want to make a film. If someone gives us money, it's great as long as they do not try to censure me.” Teofil Pancic and Ana Uzelac: *Ibid*.

24 See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 146-147.

Vietnam sagas.<sup>25</sup> Some scholars have found that the film reflects Hollywood clichés.<sup>26</sup> However Dragojevic claims that this kind of comparison is mostly because of the filmmaking style but that the film is actually “deeply European, *auteur* film.”<sup>27</sup>

In Milosevic's Serbia the civil war was represented in the media as the consequence of the so-called mythical destiny, from the Kosovo Battle until the present. In this sense the war is shown to be a phenomenon that comes in cycles: Serbs are continuing mythical battles that were started six hundred years ago. In such a case nobody is responsible and therefore nobody is to blame. The war in such an ideological construct appears to be nobody's fault or if anybody's, it is the fault of so-called traditional enemies. Some scholars and critics found that these ideas lie at the heart of Dragojevic's film. The metaphors, stereotypical representations of the characters, and the depiction of the American journalist and her interaction with Serbs were usually the reasons why the critics saw this film as a Serbian perspective on the war. According to some views, in Dragojevic's film the concrete conflict is also moved into the mythical sphere representing the war as the Balkans' destiny. Nevena Dakovic argues that Dragojevic is promoting the universal, mythical concept of war.<sup>28</sup> The metaphor of the ogre in the tunnel was seen as a mythical explanation of the war. According to Filip David, Serbian screenwriter and professor at the Faculty of Drama and Arts in Belgrade, the ogre in the tunnel supports the representation of the war as “the given state caused by some forces, which are in the domain of the mythical.”<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Dragojevic stated that the ogre in the tunnel stands as a “metaphor for primitivism and intolerance that can be found in the mentality of this region.”<sup>30</sup> Primitivism is to be found in the “mentality of the people who went to war, wishing to meet again with former neighbours when 'that' is over.”<sup>31</sup>

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25 Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 147.

26 David, Filip. “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire”. Personal e-mail (27/11/2007)

27 Srdjan Dragojevic: “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire”, personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

28 Dakovic, Nevena: *Yugoslav Wars: Between Myth and Reality*,  
<http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/mpi/conference/dakovic.htm>

29 David, Filip. “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire”. Personal e-mail (27/11/2007)

30 Srdjan Dragojevic: “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire”, personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

31 Paraphrased, Srdjan Dragojevic: “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire”, personal e-mail, (25/01/2008.)



The most common criticism of the film was the lack of a direct message against Milosevic. According to some critics this resulted in positioning the film as one that proposed that the war was nobody's fault, as in Kusturica's film *Underground*.<sup>32</sup> Some critics labelled *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* a strong anti-war film<sup>33</sup> although it was seen completely differently by other critics, as a pro-Serbian film, based on a weak story of friendship, with ideological language full of stereotypes.<sup>34</sup> Bosnian critic Hajrudin Hromadzic, for example, although recognizing that this film was not warmly welcomed by Bosnian Serbs because it was not Serbian enough, still criticized the film as one which reflects the ideological blindness of Serbian society. Hromadzic finds that the film reflects the demagoguery of its time and promotes populist ideas that ensue from the *Kosovo Myth*. He finds that the film did not respect the required time lapse from the actual Bosnian tragedy, and he compares it to the famous film of Denis Tanovic *No Man's Land* (*Nicija zemlja*, 2001), which in his opinion unlike *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* takes no one's side in its depiction of the war, and in that sense is "ideologically naïve."<sup>35</sup> What most critics and scholars who had similar views overlooked was to consider the subversive aspects of such representations of Milosevic's ideology. Since Dragojevic's intention was to deal with the "Serbian side", this portrayal of stereotypes and the demagoguery of the Milosevic regime should be explored as it might bear subversive elements.

The stereotypical portrayal of Serbs, but also of Muslims, can bring in the perspective of the "wild Balkan man" that Frederick Jameson discussed.<sup>36</sup> Iordanova identified the stereotypical depiction of the Balkan people as "voluntarily self

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32 See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p.111-155.

33 "This is not Eastern European art-house stuff, this is real cinema." *Economist*

"Its delicate blend of Ivo Andric, political satire, Bunuel and superior Tarantino." *Sight&Sound*

"Spectacle in the tradition of Kusturica, Fellini and Peckinpah." *Hollywood Reporter*

"In sensibility this film embodies elements of Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism and Samuel Beckett's absurdist humanism...Wilder in its black humor than "Mash", bolder in its vision of politics and the military than any movie Stanley Kubrick has made, *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* is one of the most audacious antiwar statements ever committed to the big screen." *Variety*

DVD "Pretty Village Pretty Flame", Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.

34 See Hromadzic, Hajrudin: *Ibid*.

35 See Hromadzic, Hajrudin: *Ibid*.

36 See Jameson, Frederick: *Thoughts on Balkan Cinema* in Atom Egoyan & Ian Balfour, ed.: *Subtitles*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: MIT Press, 2004, p. 233-234.

banishing.”<sup>37</sup> In this way, as Iordanova concludes “Balkan cinema contributes to the project of exclusion and Third-Worldisation.”<sup>38</sup> On the other hand scholars like Dusan Bjelic argued completely the opposite: that these stereotypes are present in film only in order to be subverted.<sup>39</sup> In this thesis and as a part of my analysis I will further explore the potential subversiveness of such cinematic representations.

Another element that was perceived as problematic in the film is the character of the American journalist. The American journalist represents, in the opinion of some critics, the Westerner who gets involved without a real understanding of the locals or the conflict, which is “clearly a comment to the international community's support for Serbia's enemies by using the sub tone of Serbia's self reflection of the border post of Christianity.”<sup>40</sup> Furthermore she was seen as a “metaphor for understanding the Serbian side of the war” because she finds that “these primitive, rough warriors underneath have brave and proud hearts and are honest people.”<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, some critics found that Dragojevic “certainly does not make heroes out of his motley crew of junkies and pickpockets” and that the film represents “a remarkable portrait of what was lost in personal, not political terms.”<sup>42</sup>

I focus on the issues of stereotypical representation of the characters in detail in the next section 5.3. In this sense in the next section I will explore how the film informs its audience about the people and the impact of local mythologies on them.

I intend to demonstrate that the analysis of specific elements in the film narrative can provide a new and different understanding of the film. As a contribution to the debates around this film, the central part of this analysis is based upon the question of whether the film provided a critical depiction of nationalism and religious ideology.

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37 Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 67-68.

38 Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 68.

39 See Jameson, Frederick in Egoyan, Atom and Balfour, Ian ed.: *Subtitles, On the Foreignness of Film*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2004.

40 Buder, Bernd, “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire” Personal e-mail (19/11/2007)

41 David, Filip, “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire” Personal e-mail (27/11/2007)

42 Morrison, Alan: *No. 29 The Balkans: Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, Sunday Herald, 12/10/2008, p. 25.

### 5.3. Film Analysis: Contextualizing the Characters

The six main characters depicted in the film each represent a different social group in Serbia. They are diverse in education and according to the regions they come from. Their bold and to some extent stereotypical representation, in the director's view, had specific functions in the film's plot: "I used stereotypes and clichés as a model for deconstructing them, and in the end to make fun of them."<sup>43</sup> With a dose of black humour, as we will see later, Dragojevic deconstructs some of the ideological premises of the time, especially through Fork's character, where he is subverting an image of *chetnik* but also the new nationalist-religious myths.

Dragojevic paints the characters, some of whom are indoctrinated by the regime's propaganda; but he avoids painting the alternative voices, characters who truly oppose the regime. Even when he does, as in the case of anti-war demonstrators, they are represented not too differently from the way in which Milosevic's propaganda presented them. This was the director's goal: he wanted viewers to see the world through the eyes of the main character, Milan. In Dragojevic's words: "It is not my personal, but Milan's view; I think it is important to see things through the eyes of the main character. He thinks he is fighting for Serbdom, and this ideological platform is not created in his village, but in Belgrade, where he now lies wounded and finds nothing but disdain."<sup>44</sup>

The director keeps on trying to portray the personal views of all of the characters, their motives, their understanding of the world around them, and the impact that nationalist-religious ideology had in shaping them. However the director denies that he wanted to justify the actions of his characters. He wanted to show how the ideological construction of Milosevic's propaganda had direct impacts on diverse people in different milieux and of diverse cultural background. He is interested in the so-called victims of propaganda, people who truly believed in Milosevic's ideological concept. "When you succeed in giving life to such characters, it must have a positive

43 Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, 25/01/2008.

44 Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, 25/01/2008.

effect on the film, due to the fact that they are in the first place realistic.”<sup>45</sup>

### 5.3.1. *The People* versus Liberals?

In this section I briefly discuss the cinematic portrayal of the so-called cultural clash that can be understood also as a consequence of the ideological conflicts that have existed historically in this region.<sup>46</sup> Although probably not intentionally, the portrayal of some of the characters in the film provides us with an insight into the difference between so-called urban and provincial mentality. This is a result of the director's personal impression that in urban parts of Bosnia where Serbs and Muslims lived together, friendships were possible because they were more exposed to cultural and social changes and modernization, while rural areas were divided into Muslim and Serbian villages which did not provide many possibilities for developing ties, especially because many families still remembered atrocities from the Second World War.<sup>47</sup> In such areas, people were living more traditionally while modernization was taking place more in the cities. Dragojevic decided to set the story about the friendship between a Serb and a Muslim in just such a rural area. Setting the plot in a rural area and painting some of the rural characters gives us a hint of the perception of something known as the simple, *people's spirit*.<sup>48</sup> This division in cultural identity is still present in Serbia, especially in the political divides of so-called “people's national block” and more liberal wings.

While this complex clash within society was not examined directly in the film, the film nevertheless gives several pointers to it. One of them is to be found in the conversation between Fork and professor, where the director was undoubtedly portraying the situation in Serbia where independent intellectuals were perceived and

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45 Srdjan Dragojevic, “*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire”, personal e-mail, 25/01/2008.

46 In chapter 4, in the discussion of the film *Premeditated Murder* I discussed this problem in more detail. The background of the so-called cultural conflicts and the way they result from the ideological conflicts of the political elite over the last century is briefly discussed in chapter 3.

47 See Teofil Pancic and Ana Uzelac: *Ibid*.

48 The *vox-populi* terminology was recalling the idea of the “pure, people's soul”, the term that was supposed to mark an uneducated but honest and courageous Serbian peasant. This concept of *the people* was discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

represented as a threat to the whole system which was based on a pro-war ideology. It is illustrated in the words of Fork: on the professor's saying that they had burnt the village whose name they did not even know, killing each other for a fistful of ashes, Fork replies: "if you intellectuals had been asked, all of Serbia would have gone to hell." Obviously this sentence does not refer to the regime's intellectuals, such as the authors of the *Memorandum*, but to the significant number of writers, professors, journalists, and other citizens, all dissidents in the Milosevic regime, who were not only suppressed by the regime but often overlooked and ignored by the foreign media, which stereotypically represented Serbia as a pro-Milosevic, nationalist country.<sup>49</sup> Rather than referring to the character of the professor, who after all is an active participant in the war, Fork's words reflect a common attitude against independent intellectuals.

Petar, a professor from Bosnia, is not what they called an *independent intellectual*<sup>50</sup> (my italics), but still he represents the only intellectual among the six characters in the tunnel. He is at the same time the only character whose personal story is not revealed in the film. We do not know his motives for participating in the war nor how he ends up on the battlefield. He is the only character who shows a certain discomfort during the war operations, and who at the end of the film tries to stop Milan from killing a Muslim soldier. The professor however does not reflect the liberal or anti-regime wing of Serbia. In fact the depiction of people who represent opposition to the regime is lacking in both Dragojevic's films.

### 5.3.2. Portrayal of Urbanity and Urban Pacifism

Among the characters in the tunnel there are not many representatives of the urban population, except for Brzi (Speedy) who ends up in the war accidentally. Brzi is a drug addict from Belgrade, who comes to the battlefield by chance; he falls from the

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49 See Srbljanovic, Biljana: *The Other Face of Serbia*, *Guardian*: 31.7. 1999, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk); Last accessed: 16.09. 2007.

50 This term is used in Serbia usually to mark intellectuals who were strongly critical against the regime and usually of liberal views.

bridge onto a military truck. He is a son of an ex-colonel of the Yugoslav Army, and he does not believe in the ideological assumptions of his father's generation; for example, he is selling his father's golden clock, a present from the military on his retirement, to buy drugs. His urbanity is also painted through his choice of music for example: unlike Fork or Lazar, Brzi continues to listen Western rock groups such as Rolling Stones or The Police in the battlefield. Brzi is also the only English-speaking person. In a later conversation in the hospital Brzi's friends answer Milan's question on nationality by saying that they are of a "junky nationality." This sentence reveals to us also Brzi's identity, which is everything but true nationalist. In fact when introducing himself to the camera of an American journalist he starts it with a line from the Rolling Stones' song *Sympathy for the Devil*: "Please allow me to introduce myself..."<sup>51</sup> In this way, Brzi is portrayed as a character whose background does not have much to do with local national mythologies, but in fact reflects more of the Western influence in shaping his identity.

Besides Brzi, there is the character of Velja, who represents the so-called urban criminals. Velja demonstrates his urbanity mostly through referring to other characters, especially Lazar and Fork, as peasants. An ex-criminal, who committed robberies abroad, mostly in Germany, Velja was mobilized instead of his younger brother, a prospective student whom he wanted to protect. Through the story of Velja, Dragojevic here describes a situation in Serbia at the beginning of the civil war, when Milosevic's military police mobilized young people by force for participation in war operations in Croatia and Bosnia.

The representation of the clash between city and city-dwellers versus provincial people shows in the scenes that are set in the military hospital in Belgrade. The doctor for example, at least in the beginning, seems to be taking a neutral or even pacifist view in treating both Serbian and Muslim wounded soldiers. This image however is destroyed after the doctor cordially welcomes Sloba, the war profiteer. This suggests that there were no innocent people in the war: everyone, from the

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51 DVD "Pretty Village Pretty Flame", Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.

doctor in the hospital to the anti-war demonstrators are influenced by Milosevic's ideology or are there to gain some personal interests from the war.

Through the depiction of the anti-war demonstrators the director gives another glimpse of the urban population in Belgrade, but here referring more to non-government organizations, whose motives and system of values are however questioned by the director. This is one of the biggest failures of the film in the words of professor Philip David "the most negative characters in the film are anti-war demonstrators...undefined people dressed in fur coats which is probably to mark them as traitors and foreign servants."<sup>52</sup> David argues further that this misrepresentation shows the attitude of the filmmakers towards anti-war demonstrators in general, who were in fact the opposite of the film's depiction of them, being mostly young people protesting against Milosevic's anti-war politics, many of whom lost their jobs as a result.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, Dragojevic claims that he "did not want to spear anyone" and that he took a "cynical attitude" towards different NGOs whose pacifist role for Dragojevic was "almost comical", as the "financial support they were receiving", in his opinion, "usually ended up in the leaders' pockets."<sup>54</sup> This view supported to a significant extent the official attitude of the regime, but is also a stereotype that exists even today in Serbia, of NGOs as foreign servants. This is certainly one of the major problems identified in the film, not only because such portrayal supported the regime's political stances but because it remained one of the major stereotypes in Serbian society and remains so even today. Linked with the director's deliberate avoidance of including the alternative voices in Serbia that was mentioned earlier, even when he does get a chance to show them, Dragojevic fails to do so. Therefore in Dragojevic's film Serbia remains a place of darkness with no real strength to resist or fight Milosevic's politics. The director also underlines the Western stereotypical

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52 Filip David, "*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (27/11/2007)

53 Paraphrased, Filip David, "*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (27/11/2007)

54 Srdjan Dragojevic, "*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

See also Teofil Pancic and Ana Uzelac: *Ibid.*

view of Serbs as the so-called bad guys.<sup>55</sup> This depiction also reflects a painful Serbian perception of *how others see us*. The subversion of these representations is an issue that will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 5.3.3. Ideological Differences

The film reflects the major political and ideological problems that remain in Serbian political life even today. The director focuses upon the socio-cultural diversities of the characters in the tunnel who paradoxically are united because of the war. They have different backgrounds and different political attitudes, which is most visible in the conflict between the colonel of the Yugoslav army and the nationalist views of Lazar and Fork. The only thing they have in common is their nationality, which seems to be the only guarantee of their unity. In this way, the film introduces another important issue: hegemonization of Serbs under the political ideology of Milosevic.

The image of the “simple-hearted peasant”<sup>56</sup> is represented in the characters of Fork and Lazar. Fork represents the people who were influenced by the regime's media propaganda and at the same time he represents the subverted image of a Serbian honourable peasant-warrior. Fork (Viljaska) who wears *chetnik* marks, which are nationalist symbols, and Lazar are cousins, obvious nationalists, who become involved in the war mostly because they were indoctrinated by the media propaganda of the state television. They represent the so-called uneducated, rural part of the population, with an awakened sense of national identity influenced by the Milosevic propaganda. Through their characters Dragojevic paints the influences and impacts of nationalist-religious ideology on the so-called average population of Serbia. Both Fork and Lazar believe whatever they hear in the news, from pseudo-historical facts that Serbs are the oldest and the most cultured nation in Europe who are victims of a world conspiracy to the idea that as a holy nation Serbs are leading a defensive,

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55 In the discussion about whether or not the characters should allow the American journalist to record them in the tunnel, one of the characters says that in the end it does not matter what she will do with such material because the Serbs are represented in the foreign media as descendants of Hitler anyway.

56 Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 145.



mythological battle for their sacred lands.

Ex-criminal Velja's conflict with another character, Gvozden, an ex-communist captain, once devoted to socialist ideals and now Milosevic's colonel, reveals the clash between the so-called older and younger generations in Serbia of that time. Clearly, Velja blames Tito's ex-colonels for causing the war. Gvozden's character is a metaphor for the ex-communists who now supported the Milosevic regime. It is interesting that the actor of this character (Velimir Bata Zivojinovic) is one of the most famous ex-Yugoslav actors, who became famous through his roles in partisan films of Tito's era, such as *Valter brani Sarajevo* (Hajrudin Krvavac, 1972). Gvozden is depicted as a military character once so devoted to president Tito, that he walked 350 km on foot to Tito's funeral, and who believed in the hierarchy and rules of the Yugoslav army. He becomes disillusioned in his belief in Tito, who as he admits in one scene, "knew how to lie nicely."<sup>57</sup> Gvozden is a nationalist who embodies ideas promoted in the late 1980s that Yugoslavia was a 'cemetery' for Serbs and their national interests. Nevertheless he still sees his fight as a fight for the maintenance of Yugoslavia, and his ex-comrades from the Yugoslav Army as traitors. His role depicts the official stances of Milosevic's political discourse, promoted for example through the *Memorandum* of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.<sup>58</sup>

The question at the end is whether there really are substantial ideological differences among the characters except in their rejection of the communists ideals of Tito's Yugoslavia. And are they not after all united under the umbrella of the new political ideology? The film suggests that what has really happened in Serbia is that one communist ideology has been replaced by a new, nationalist one. In this process, the partisan anti-fascist movement from the Second World War was denied in favour of *chetniks*, represented as a king's army rather than as fascist collaborators. Being a *chetnik* in the context of the 1990s was fashionable and promoted by media. This was demonstrated in various ways, from new interpretations of World War II history and open calls of the church leaders for rehabilitation of some of the *chetnik* leaders, to

<sup>57</sup> DVD "Pretty Village Pretty Flame", Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.

<sup>58</sup> See chapter 3.

the music on some of the radio-stations, such as radio Ponos.<sup>59</sup> Paradoxically these new ideas were introduced by former communists, as Velja states in his conversation with Gvozden.

Dragojevic's intention, however, was not to criticize the Tito era and this in his opinion, "was very often a misinterpretation of the film."<sup>60</sup> Dragojevic claims that in fact the communist era was the only period when people lived in peace in this region of the Balkans.<sup>61</sup> In Serbia the situation had changed since the late 1980s and the *Memorandum*, and questioning of Tito's period became a subject of many public debates. The Church leaders for example by declaring themselves anti-communist, requested a complete break with the past, which consequently led to a new division of citizens into patriots or traitors of Serbdom and Orthodoxy. With new interpretations of history it became unclear who were actually patriots and who were anti-fascists, during World War II for example. A new nationalist ideology required a strong sense of national belonging and a break with the Yugoslav past and therefore the emergence of pseudo-history can be observed as one of the essential elements of the regime's ideological discourse.

#### 5.3.4. Symbolism: Milosevic and the New Generation

One of the most interesting figures in the film is the owner of a roadhouse called "Sloga" ("Harmony"), who is provoking Milan and Halil and constantly challenges their friendship. His name Sloba, which is a nickname of Slobodan, is a reference to Slobodan Milosevic. Sloba's character is a metaphor for Milosevic, he survives the war and profits from it; and his house, turned into a warehouse during the war, remains undamaged amid all the destruction around. From the very beginning he is constantly challenging the friendship between Milan and Halil. In one of the first scenes in the film Sloba provokes tension between Milan and Halil, based on the

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<sup>59</sup> Radio Ponos (Radio Pride) hosted many war-folk singers who were referring to themselves as chetniks, war-heroes, and who were glorifying some war leaders such as Radovan Karadzic for example.

<sup>60</sup> Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

<sup>61</sup> Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

national and religious diversity of Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia. Sloba's language is the discourse known as "hate speech" of Milosevic's media. Sloba uses the term "balije", which is a libellous name for Bosnian Muslims. This term actually evokes the five hundred years of slavery under the Ottoman Empire in which many Serbs suffered for Orthodoxy or were forced to convert to Islam. It was not the film director who made this connection but the regime, which through its media was continuously reminding citizens of the historical suffering of Serbs. Sloba is the one who later in the film informs Milan that his mother was murdered and puts the blame on Halil, his Muslim friend, not losing another chance to emphasize how this friendship is impossible and how it was in fact never real. For Sloba, conflict is a chance for profit, and he is a true war profiteer.

In the film there also appears the character of Marko, who has a smaller role, and he represents the so-called young generation of the Milosevic era, to which the director devotes his next film *Wounds*. Marko is called "mascot" by other soldiers, he is not aware of the cruelty of war but his world-view is shaped by the ideology of violence of the 1990s and by nationalism. Marko is impressed with the idea that he is a Serbian soldier who is participating in war actions. Marko's character is a metaphor for a generation growing up with an identity crisis, the rise of criminal-heroes and at the same time strengthened nationalist ideas, influenced by the culture of the 1990s. It is Marko who in one of the scenes draws graffiti on the wall of a burnt-out Muslim house, "Serbia to Tokyo." The film shows the young post-Tito generation, who Dragojevic continues to deal with in *Wounds*, as bearers of nationalism. Growing up in a country of isolationism, war-propaganda, and xenophobia, young people remained the main victims of the regime. In the next part of this chapter I analyse the cinematic depiction of the nationalist-religious ideology, its characteristics, impacts and promotion in the public sphere.

#### 5.4. Representation of Nationalist-Religious Ideology in the *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*

In this section I focus on how *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* informs us about the ideological discourse of the regime. This is to be found in the subtext of the film which I analyze in the following sections. Orthodox Christianity is not explored separately in the film but is an integral part of the representation of nationalism. Although Dragojevic's intention was not to deal with religious issues *per se*, the film nevertheless informs us about the institutional religion, Serbian Orthodoxy, to a significant extent. Dragojevic's intention was not to "ridicule religion" but "instant" Orthodoxy and rediscovered national tradition, which in the 1990s political context represented the opening of "Pandora's box."<sup>62</sup> The "pact" of the Church with the state, which began in the 1980s, for Dragojevic was a pact "with the devil", that resulted in a deviation of religion.<sup>63</sup> The populist use of religion for political purposes and criminalization of society is one of the consequences of this process that the director wanted to describe.<sup>64</sup> The director is not sure to what extent this was a "conscious – intentional process", as the representation of religious images was not a major question for him<sup>65</sup> however, this depiction provides an insight into the dominant iconography of the 1990s, which was a mixture of nationalist and religious symbols.

Religious symbols are included in the story as inseparable from the representation of nationalism. Religious intolerance is made visible as an integral part of the conflict as we have seen previously in the analysis of Sloba's character who uses libelous names for Bosnian Muslims. It will also be discussed in the section on the perception of otherness. We shall look here at some of the main characters that demonstrate

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62 Paraphrased Srdjan Dragojevic, "*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

63 Paraphrased Srdjan Dragojevic, "*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

64 "In the TV show that I did for New Year in 1995, I had two criminals as the main characters who were wearing big crosses and who referred to the crucified Christ as a gymnast." Srdjan Dragojevic, "*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

65 Srdjan Dragojevic, "*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

their Orthodox identity or bring in awareness of the religious diversity between Serbs and Muslims. I also analyse the use of religious images in the film and their meaning in the context in which they are represented.

#### 5.4.1. National and Religious Identity of the Characters

We learn most about the impact of a nationalist-religious mythology through one of the main characters in the tunnel, Lazar's brother-in-law, with the nickname Fork. Both Lazar and Fork are metaphors for the population who embraced the regime's ideology. Fork wears *chetnik* marks and demonstrates throughout the whole film his belonging to Orthodox Christianity. In one of the first scenes with Fork we see him greeting the UN soldier with the traditional Orthodox Easter greeting "Christ is Risen." The scene takes place somewhere in Bosnia at a battlefield, in the zone protected by the UN. The absurdity of the situation is accentuated by Fork's personal vulgarity and by the conversation being set among war profiteers.

Fork's religious identity reveals a primitive superstitious religiosity where personal faith is replaced by the empty practice of religious customs and repetition of phrases without any deeper meaning or understanding of them. Some of these phrases are "God protects Serbs", "God will grant", followed by repeated self-crossing. He lives with the delusion that God protects Serbs because Serbs are a holy nation, without examining this myth. Like his friend Lazar, Fork believes in a nationalist-religious myth of Serbs as a chosen nation, the idea based on the abuse of the *Kosovo Myth*. The mythological language popularised in Serbia during the 1990s is revealed also in the scene when Fork explains into the camera of the American journalist, that "Serbs are the oldest nation." As the oldest nation Serbs were also the most cultured nation and the first to use forks, as Fork explains, at the time when others, such as the English or Germans "were still eating with their hands."<sup>66</sup> It is from this belief that Fork got his nickname. While he makes this passionate speech he is shaking his fork at the camera. Fork looks not dangerous but ridiculous, and it was obviously the

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<sup>66</sup> DVD "Pretty Village Pretty Flame", Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.

director's intention to ridicule the local mythology and the pseudo historical facts that emerged from it. However through the fact that Fork participates in the war we find that this ideology was actually the most dangerous one as it remains Fork's main motive for getting involved in the conflict.

The story of how Fork goes to the battlefield is told in a flashback, which connects with the scene of his death. Fork chose to die afterwards, as we can assume, when he became aware not just of the hopelessness of the situation but also of the absurdity of the ideas in which they all have become trapped. He falls on the ground in a crucified position. This crucified position might identify Fork as a victim. Through Fork's character Dragojevic paints the way in which the populist propaganda of nationalist-religious ideology found good ground among the less educated citizens, who were from the provincial parts of Serbia, mainly exposed to national media propaganda, and who at the time represented a significant part of the population of Serbia. The film suggests that, although he is a negative character and a participant in a brutal conflict, he is also a victim of the regime's ideology. The film does not deny Fork's fault but it raises the question of the responsibility of those who started the war verbally through the affirmation of nationalist-religious ideology which was a justification for the armed conflict. In this sense, Fork remains a predator but is also a victim. Dragojevic's film testifies not only that the war was bad or that its participants were brutal murderers, but as I argue, it proposes that a great deal of the responsibility lies with the war ideologists.

The character of Sloba, the war-profiteer and the one who insists on nationalist-religious bigotry from the beginning of the film, is the war ideologist. Sloba, who stands for Milosevic, provokes national tensions between Milan, who stands for Serbs, and Halil who stands for the Muslims. He tells Halil for example that he cannot read Bosnian newspapers as they are too big to hold, "like a sheet", but "they are good for Muslim prayer."<sup>67</sup> After a doctor in the military hospital in Belgrade reminds Milan that all patients are equal to him, whether Serbs or Muslims, and that

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67 DVD "Pretty Village Pretty Flame", Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.

they are all in a foreign country, we see Sloba visiting the hospital with bribes for the doctor. The doctor's attitude may be associated with the official attitude of the time, that Serbia was not involved in the Bosnian war. The scene in which the doctor welcomes Sloba, who gives him a painting of the *Kosovo Maiden*, suggests that Serbia was not a foreign country, but the motherland of the ideology based on the *Kosovo Myth* symbolically embodied in the painting. The symbolic meaning of this image will be discussed in the next section, on religious images in the film.

#### 5.4.2. Religious Images in the Film

*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, like the next Dragojevic film *Wounds*, has a significant number of religious images. The films have plenty of scenes with religious symbols that refer to Serbian Orthodoxy. These images represent the modern iconography of the 1990s and they became an expression of nationalism rather than of the sacred. In the Serbian public sphere there developed a "nationalist cult of images"<sup>68</sup> which David Morgan has discussed and which is not a uniquely Serbian phenomenon. Similar trends and elements can be found in American civil religion, where "the cult of nationhood" developed symbols that gained "iconic status" and were used "to promote American patriotism and nationalism."<sup>69</sup> Religious images in the film are not intrusive, and their function is similar to that of the music in the film: they inform us of the cultural context and of the increase of historical and Orthodox ideas in the public sphere, which was connected directly with the rise of nationalism.

A sign that reappears continuously in the film is the cross with the four "s" which one of the characters, the Professor, wears on his helmet<sup>70</sup> (see Figure 2). This sign

68 Morgan, David: *The Sacred Gaze*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005, p. 130.

69 Morgan, David: *Ibid*, p. 130.

70 Four "s" usually refers to the slogan: 'Only unity saves Serbs' ('Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava'). Besides this populist interpretation, according to the historical sources these four "s" placed around four sides of the cross actually come from the Byzantine empire and the naval flag of the dynasty of Palaeologus. Originally these were four Greek letters "V", which refer to Jesus Christ (Βασιλεὺς Βασιλευόντων Βασιλευουσισ, The King of kings who reigns over the queen of cities Constantinople, and according to the second version it means: O King help the King of the Queen of Cities-Constantinople)

[http://www.nasasrbija.co.yu/skupstina/t\\_stolica13-1\\_3.htm](http://www.nasasrbija.co.yu/skupstina/t_stolica13-1_3.htm); Last accessed: 18/7/2008.

emerged in the public sphere at the beginning of the 1990s basically for politically purposes. The aim was to remind Serbs that only through unity, in the political sense of the 1990s, can they maintain their state, political and national integrity. Four letters “s” stand as symbols for this unity and they are placed around the cross that stands for Orthodox Christianity. In this sense the state is not understood as a secular state but as a form of Orthodox national state that will unite all Serbs. Paradoxically this sign is worn by a professor who, as we have previously seen, was criticized by Fork as an intellectual lacking Serbdom.



Figure 2: Professor with the cross with four “S”; *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. With courtesy of “Cobra Film.”

This symbol mainly represents a visual public celebration of Serbian nationalism that took place in the 1990s. In the battlefield, where it usually appeared as graffiti on the wall, the image had the function of a symbolic marker of territory expressing the desirable extension of the real borders of Serbia. This image has been included within the coat of arms, and since 2004 has been on the official state flag of the Republic of Serbia. It is also on the official flag of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Its meaning varies according to the socio-political and historical context but in the context of the 1990s, it has nationalist connotations and stands as one of the symbols



of the nationalist-religious ideology of the 1990s. The sacramental image in this case receives the connotation of a social image. The sacramental is excluded in favour of a social image that serves as a source for national, social, cultural and religious identification. In this sense, we see a progression of this image from sacramental to socio-political. For many who survived the war, in former republics, this image still stands as a symbol of Serbian nationalism. Certainly, sacramental connotation is lost in this context.

One of the most provocative images is certainly the one of Fork, trapped in the tunnel, with an Orthodox cross hanging next to his head while he is firing a machine gun, giving a Muslim name to each bullet (See Figure 3).



Figure 3: Fork with a cross and a bullet. *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. With courtesy of “Cobra Film.”

This powerful scene paints not only Fork's personal religiosity as it may appear at the first moment, but reflects the deviation of religion and Orthodoxy in the 1990s. Again this does not represent criticism of religion *per se*, but its political misuse both by war ideologists and by the church representatives. In the 1990s therefore the public image of the cross does not symbolize a call to redemption but a nationalist form of expression, a call to arms and fratricidal war. Paradoxically in the name of Christ and righteousness, Serbs are called to perform a sacred war against their

neighbours who are perceived as the perpetrators. The cross therefore no longer stands as an image of love for neighbours but as a deviated image, an image of war. The ruling nationalist-religious ideology and its direct impact is embodied in this scene of Fork with the cross and the machine gun. The absence of the church's public mission to build peace resulted in subordinating Orthodox Christianity to the nationalist ideology of the time. Unity in the bloodshed of neighbours replaced unity in Christlike love.

The symbol of the fist with three fingers up is a greeting that demonstrates belonging to the Serbian Orthodox nation.<sup>71</sup> Under the sign is written the slogan “Serbia to Tokyo”, a populist catch-phrase used by the most militant warlords which reflected, even if there is an element of humour there, the tendency to include all Serbian territories in what is called “Greater Serbia.”<sup>72</sup> (See Figure 4)

The greeting with three fingers up was widely used in the 1990s and its meaning varied, from a nationalist greeting to the symbol of resistance against Milosevic during the demonstrations in 1991. This is again one of the images that signifies the connection between the religious and national in the contemporary political context. Serbs are to be united as one people, of one blood and faith under Orthodox Christianity in one state, an ideology widely promoted, as we have seen in previous chapters, in all areas of public life.

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71 In the Orthodox Church believers cross themselves with three fingers, and this sign stands in populist interpretation as a symbol for Serbs as Orthodox.

72 See chapter 3.



Figure 4: Milan in front of the symbol of the fist with three fingers raised. *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. With courtesy of “Cobra Film.”

The image of the *Kosovo Maiden* in one of the hospital scenes has both national and religious character. The legend of the *Kosovo Maiden* is a part of the *Kosovo Myth*. According to this legend the Kosovo maiden was a fiancée of one of the Serbian knights and she came to Kosovo field, after the battle, to find her beloved one. She carried wine and bread for wounded soldiers. She has a sacral rather than medical role as she gives the soldiers a last communion, weeping over them. The painting in the film ironically suggests the ideological concept of the civil war as a just war: Serbian soldiers are martyrs and the war in Bosnia is a continuation of the Kosovo battle. The war profiteer, Sloba, who gives the painting as a gift to a doctor, symbolizes Milosevic as a bearer of this ideological concept. The image has not only a symbolic but also a subversive connotation in the film, since Sloba does not in fact care for soldiers but uses the war as a source of personal extra profit.

#### 5.4.3. The Emergence of Pseudo-History

Ideological discourse is presented in the film in the form of an obsession with national history. The film offers plenty of indicators of the emergence of pseudo-

history as an inseparable element in the formation of nationalist-religious ideology. These are represented in the subtext of the film. For example, in the scene with Fork's speech about Serbs being the oldest nation we discover the pseudo-historical ideas affirmed in Serbia in the early 1990s. At another point in the film a soldier in the hospital sings a song "who says, who lies that Serbia is small", next to the Christmas tree decorated with a sign of the Orthodox cross with four "s." Not only did this song embody the political desire of Milosevic's ideologists for Greater Serbia, but also it was used to underline the importance of the historical moment of the 1990s and the reunion of Serbs under the chosen leader, Slobodan Milosevic.

A scene of recruiting of volunteer soldiers and a short conversation between Fork and a street salesman who sells flags and other nationalist emblems, show the commercialization of mythology. At the same time, the scene reveals how mythology replaced reality: how reality is supposed to represent just a continuation of the mythological existence of the nation. The whole scene is set in the night of mobilization, and looks almost surreal. The absurd arguments of a street salesman are followed by the strong rhythm of the trumpets, under a black flag on which is written: With Faith in God - Freedom or Death. The so-called "market of history and Orthodoxy" was common in Serbia, especially in the early 1990s.

The film depicts the increase in nationalist songs popularised in Serbia and their political connotations, whose aim was to invoke a memory of a glorious and heroic past before the establishment of Tito's Yugoslavia. An awakened sense of nationalist-religious identity was successful because of the re-interpretation of history and the use of religious myths. These were commonly used to show the civil war as a just conflict.

#### 5.4.4. Representation of Media Propaganda in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*

The film shows how the conflict was first initiated in the regime's media with language which contributed to the escalation of the war. In the scene where he

introduces us to the two characters Fork and Lazar, we discover more about this media discourse. Lazar, his family and neighbours are all gathered around one TV set, where they are devotedly watching a news broadcast on Radio Television of Serbia, RTS. The scene is set in a rural area, which could be anywhere in Serbia, an area covered only by RTS since all the other independent stations at that time hardly covered even the whole city of Belgrade. Images of destruction are followed by the voice of the regime's journalist. In the news that Lazar is watching Serbs are victimized while others were identified as enemies and predators: Croats were identified with Ustashi from the Second World War and Bosnian Muslims with Turks from the Ottoman Empire. Media propaganda frequently refers to Bosnian Muslims as Jihad warriors. Serbian people are at the same time depicted as the nation that fights against the "new world order." The new world order was a phrase commonly used by Milosevic's ideologists but also within the Church. Phrases such as this one that Dragojevic includes in scenes with media propaganda, reveal the complex political machinery that was behind this phrase. Historical injustices against Serbs, that are reiterated over and over again in the media, as we see in the film, echo the arguments of Milosevic's warlords. Dragojevic's depiction of the role of media propaganda is not to be underestimated, as its place in the film is not simply to justify Lazar's actions, but rather to show how Milosevic's ideology was promoted by media propaganda. Motivated by the media's interpretation of the war Lazar decides to join the army. He is convinced that he is defending Orthodoxy and Serbdom from an Islamic invasion. Ironically when he hitch-hikes to the battlefield, the man who drives him there is a Muslim. Lazar remains confused with the situation, incapable of recognizing that he is deluded by local mythologies.

#### 5.4.5. The Serbian Perception of *Others*

The Bosnian Muslim characters are represented through the eyes of the main Serbian characters. Our perception of *others* in that sense depends on the gaze of Serbian soldiers which was "an important premise of the scenario."<sup>73</sup> Apart for Halil and the

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73 Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, 25.01.2008.

postman Nazim, Bosnian Muslims are rarely represented in the film. The depiction of Bosnian Muslims in the pre-war period is significantly different from the one during the war time. In the scenes that take place during the conflict we see Muslim soldiers only as shadows. Shadowy soldiers again can be differently interpreted. Since we see them primarily through the eyes of Serbs they are impersonal figures, since the perception of *other as neighbour* (my italics) no longer exists. Former neighbours are enemies now, whose deformed voices represent the complete distortion of their image as human beings.

On the other hand at the very beginning of the film both Halil and Nazim are portrayed positively. Halil's image remains human till the very end, which suggests that in spite of participating in the conflict against him Milan did not forget their friendship and the bonds they had. Another suggestion is that Serbs see their neighbours, Bosnian Muslims, as some kind of mythological figures of Turks, their so-called traditional enemies, rather than as the real people with whom they used to live. On the other hand Nazim's destiny is not revealed to us, we know only segments of his past that connected with the story of Milan and Halil's friendship. Nazim is portrayed as a naïve, ordinary villager, who honestly believed in the Yugoslav idea of fraternity; this is clearly demonstrated in the scene when Nazim is leaving, with Tito's picture on the car that Nazim is taking to his refugee life. This scene suggests the exodus that is to come, of the Muslim population in the Bosnian areas with Serbian majorities.

The atrocities of Bosnian Muslims are shown in the scene of Marko's death, which we do not see, but hear the sounds of the agony of the dying youngster. This scene allows the reading that Dragojevic was proposing that all sides are guilty in the war. In the director's view his intention was to show that atrocities were committed on both sides, and to say differently "would be a lie."<sup>74</sup> The director draws a parallel between both sides rather than making an obvious political statement. Similarities between Serbs and Muslims lie in their sense of humour but also in killing, two

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<sup>74</sup> Paraphrased Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

things that frequently overlap throughout the film. However, although this portrayal allows diverse reading, including the one that the film showed Bosnian Muslims equally as war criminals, it is important to notice that the film does not aim to provide a political analysis of the war, but rather to paint the Serbian participants and the ideological discourse that was justifying their actions.

The most common names for Bosnian Muslims used in the film are “balijs”, “circumcised” and “Turks”, which are the terms used in Milosevic's media. This shows how for Serbs, their former neighbours, Bosnian Muslims, became foreigners and deadly enemies. The designation of former neighbors as “Turks” was a result of pseudo-history, myths and religion in the political discourse of Slobodan Milosevic, and the director shows how people influenced by this ideology now perceived their former neighbors and friends in a completely different way. The film however, paradoxically, shows more commonalities between Serbs and Muslims than actual diversities. People from Bosnia, besides sharing the same language, were bonded by the same ideology of brotherhood and unity. At the beginning of the 1990s ethnicity and religious belonging became political issues. This is a result of the emergence of the nationalist-religious ideology which was in the service of the strong pro-war propaganda.

Some critics claimed that the character of the American journalist was created for Westerners who should sympathize with Serbs through her eyes. However, there is more potential in this character in the film. Rather than standing just as a kind of political message to the foreign audience she also reveals the Serbian self-perception. By self-perception I mean mainly the stereotypes and perception of masculinity that exist within the Serbian culture. By using these stereotypes the director deconstructs the image of macho-Serbs. Through the brutal treatment of an American journalist by Serbs we find about the brutality of the Balkan man towards women, and about violence as a cultural model of communication.

More importantly, she indicates something that has been overlooked so far in reading

this character. She is the depiction of the Serbian perception of the West and she also reveals the unscrupulous attitude of Milosevic's regime towards the international community. Dragojevic also paints this problem in his next film *Wounds* where the news on National TV about the sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia by the international community, is followed by the trivial lines of a folk-song: "nobody can do anything to us, we are stronger than destiny, those who doesn't like us and can only hate us." In this way Dragojevic depicts a certain carelessness of society in general about isolation from the international community. The sense of self-satisfaction verging on absurdity and xenophobia coloured with strong prejudice against the West whose media was perceived as demonizing all Serbs, was spread through Milosevic's nationalist ideology and was supported by media discourse, as we have seen in the previous analysis of the cinematic representation of media propaganda. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this anti-Western attitude was equally supported by the Church leaders who created a discourse about the West as a cultural and political entity which never supported and appreciated the Serbian struggle throughout history. Not surprisingly the only one who has decent communication with the West that the American journalist stands for, is Brzi, the urban junkie. The interaction of Serbs with an American journalist reveals existing frustrations of Serbs with the West. The American journalist in the film mirrors the ideological trends of the 1990s, where demonization of the West through conspiracy theories promoted in the media, were used to justify the conflict. Her character reveals equally therefore the Serbian perception of their own self-image and the Serbian perception of the West which was to an important extent shaped by the nationalist-religious ideology of the 1990s.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

In the analysis of *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, I have discussed the cinematic representation of nationalist-religious ideology. I have looked at the cinematic depiction of the emergence of pseudo-history and mythological discourse in media propaganda. I have also analysed religious images and nationalist symbols in the context of the film, elements that were frequently overlooked in existing readings of



this film.

The analysis of the main characters shows that the film depicted the process of reconstruction of Serbian national identity in the 1990s and after the collapse of the socialist ideology of brotherhood and fraternity of Tito's era. I argue that rather than aiming to provide a simplified portrayal of “victims and villains” the film framed ideological issues. In this sense I argue that the film is not taking the Serbian side by providing sympathy for villains, as some critics claimed, but on the contrary it subverts the Serbian self-image based on the ideological premises of the 1990s. First, the film subverts the image of Serbian warriors as brave and honest mythological figures. Second, this lack of division of the characters into purely positive and negative makes them more realistic, as people with conflicts and doubts that are not necessarily represented in Hollywood style as innocently good or completely bad.<sup>75</sup> The director stated that his intention was to deal with the Serbian role in the conflict:

I think it is important to deal with this side, our crimes, our heroic deeds that took place, our sins. What do I care about others? Let Croats and Muslims make films about themselves. In fact I am proud that it is us who were the first to make a film which does not portray their own side in a good light. Someone malicious called this “traditional Serbian masochism.” However, if there is anything positive left in us, this is it, even if someone wishes to call it masochism.<sup>76</sup>

In this sense I argued that the film offers a pro-Serbian perspective on the problems, one which often includes ironic self-introspection. Although black humour can create a sympathetic angle for the main characters which critics found as *taking the Serbian side* (my italics), the film is doing the exactly the opposite by offering a subversive portrayal of the Serbian self-image. The representation of the characters, as already mentioned, demystifies the ideal of honourable Serbian fighters as peasant-heroes

<sup>75</sup> See Deacy, Chris: *Ibid*, p. 137.

<sup>76</sup> Teofil Pancic and Ana Uzelac: *Ibid*.

with brave hearts.<sup>77</sup>

Further I have argued that the film subverts many other premises and images that represented the political ideology of the 1990s. First it is important to say that the film frames the nationalist-religious ideology as the dominant ideology of the 1990s. Second, the film reveals ideological and cultural clashes that existed in Serbia. The film shows that the nationalist ideology was supported by the former communists and that the communist ideology of Tito's time was replaced by another ideology, a nationalist-religious one.

How this ideology was promoted we see through the cinematic representation of Milosevic's media propaganda. The impacts of such ideology on so-called ordinary people is given through the representation of the motives of some of the main characters for the participation in the war. Obsession with pseudo-history and local mythologies, such as that of Serbs being the oldest nation, are shown in several parts of the film. The scene of recruiting soldiers for the war, for example, unites all the symbols of the ideology, flags of *chetniks* from World War II, people crossing themselves, and the sound of trumpets with folk music, which all together show the rise of the nationalist hysteria. The emergence of pseudo-historical content and a populist version of Orthodoxy into the public sphere, as it is depicted in the film, reveals the importance of the ideology in the escalation of the war.

The film critically explores some of the fundamental stereotypes and myths upon which Milosevic's populist rhetoric was based. There are several ideological assumptions underlying the conflict in Serbia at the time that the film represented, such as that Serbs are a heavenly people<sup>78</sup> who suffer because of their righteousness, that "God protects Serbs" because they are waging a defensive war, or that Serbs are a martyr nation whose suffering is caused by a "world conspiracy."<sup>79</sup> This

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<sup>77</sup> See discussion of anthropologists Ivan Colovic on Serbian political myths in the section: "Skerlic i srpski politicki mitovi" in Colovic, Ivan: *Politika simbola*, Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2002, p. 125-142.

<sup>78</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>79</sup> See chapter 3.

deconstruction of the nationalist-religious ideology is found in the sub-text of the film. Through analysis of the representation of religion and religious images we see that the film depicted religion as inseparable from the sense of national identity. Serbian Orthodoxy is shown in its deviant form of the 1990s, as a religious ideology unified with nationalism. The film provides pointers to the way in which nationalism and religious intolerance were directly connected.

The representation of the conflict as a continuation of the historical battle for Serbdom is subverted through scenes where for example war sites are depicted as places of black market. The symbol of an ogre in the tunnel may suggest that primitivism and intolerance are among the main preconditions for the success of populist ideologies rather than just being a symbol of the mythological force that is rooted in the Balkans mentality. In this chapter I suggested that it is useful to reconsider whether the film really offered a mythical understanding of the war or whether it actually subverted this idea. The film shows that this mythical reading was created by the regime's ideology and promoted through its media propaganda. This means that the mythical reading of the war in the film is represented as a strand within the discourse of the political ideology of the 1990s. In that case we can conclude that the film does not offer the stereotyped depiction of the war as a part of the Balkan destiny, but rather attempts to explore this ideological premise. The representation of nationalist-religious ideology suggests that the idea of a mythical war in the film is subverted rather than promoted.

The film does not offer solutions, ambitious explanations or explicit political judgements. On the other hand, reading the film's sub-text and understanding it within the specific cultural context in which it was made, enables us to see some of the subversive elements in the film. Dragojevic claims that he was interested only in "dealing with the Serbian side" which he finds as "the only fair approach" to the subject.<sup>80</sup> This approach enables the viewers to see the Serbian ideological context of the 1990s and the Serbs' own perception of the Bosnian War. The director also shows

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80 Srdjan Dragojevic, "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame Questionnaire", personal e-mail, (25/01/2008)

the war as profitable for Milosevic's nationalists but at the same time destructive for others, victims of this ideological discourse. In that sense, this is a film about how the war destroyed not the Bosnian Muslims but the Serbs themselves. The film was primarily aimed at a Serbian audience rather than at a Bosnian or foreign one. As Iordanova argues, this film was about “making Serbs confront their own wrongdoings” but with an “all-sides-are-guilty approach.”<sup>81</sup> On the other hand subversive elements found in this film point to the political discourse of the regime and its responsibility for the war.

*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* is an ambiguous film, and only when we look at its subtext will it inform us about the time when it was made and about the ideology promoted in Serbia that underpinned the war. To overlook these elements would be to read the film incorrectly. I have suggested in this chapter that by analyzing the text and subtext of the film we find the elements that can be considered as subversive. Describing the film as purely pro-Serbian or anti-Serbian as was frequently the case, would be an incorrect and oversimplified reading of the film. The film is far more complex because it reflects the ideological trends within which it was made, at the same time subverting some of these ideological premises. By doing this the film offered to a significant extent a criticism of the ideology of the 1990s.

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<sup>81</sup> Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 143.

## Chapter 6

### *Wounds*

#### 6.0. Introduction

Chapter 6 is devoted to the analysis of the film *Wounds* (Rane, Srdjan Dragojevic, 1998). This is the second film in which Dragojevic tackles the issue of the Yugoslav break-up and the regime of Slobodan Milosevic. In this film he critically explores Serbian society of the 1990s. The film was received by some critics, as will be discussed later, as the director's strongest anti-regime statement. As in his previous film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, Dragojevic builds a complex narrative with a lot of symbolism. Analysis of this narrative and its contextualization will provide a fuller understanding of the film and give better insights into the socio-political circumstances in Serbia of the 1990s that the film describes. My central questions are: how did the film depict the impacts of nationalist-religious ideology on Serbian society and to what extent was this portrayal critical and subversive? In this sense I discuss in this chapter how the film shows the emergence of the regime's ideology and its connection to the criminalization of society.

In the first part of this chapter, 6.1., I briefly discuss film genre, I consider the process of making the film and the film plot. In the second part, 6.2., I survey the critical reviews of the film and I discuss the most important themes. Although the film did not provoke the controversial debates that *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* did, I find that not enough attention was given to certain issues that this film raises. My aim is to enrich this discussion by offering new perspectives on *Wounds*.

The next two sections 6.3. and 6.4. are the central parts of this chapter and are devoted to the analysis of the film. I first discuss the main characters of the film who

I contextualize within the socio-cultural and political context of the 1990s. I explore the ideological and generational conflict of *fathers and sons* (my italics) that took place in the 1990s. I focus on the female characters in the film. My aim is to discuss the cinematic representation of three culturally dominant types, which though being a stereotypical portrayal provides an insight into the perception of women within the masculine warrior culture of the 1990s. After this I consider the depiction of criminals and war profiteers, who are metaphors for the real people of the Serbian cultural and political milieu.

In section 6.4. I analyze the cinematic representation of the impacts of the new political ideology of Slobodan Milosevic on Serbian society. In order to understand the connections that the director draws between ideological discourse, war, crime and the formation of the new culture of the 1990s I divide my analysis into four parts. First I look at the how the film shows the rise of nationalism in Serbia and the beginning of the war. There follows an analysis of nationalist and religious images in the film. Then the focus shifts to the cinematic representation of the role of media propaganda in the 1990s. Finally, I look at how the film depicted the Milosevic culture of the 1990s, the economic collapse and the formation of a new system of values. Section 6.5. is the conclusion in which I discuss the findings based on my analysis.

### **6.1. *Wounds* (Rane, 1998)**

In this section I consider genre, the process of making the film and the plot.

#### **6.1.1. Genre**

*Wounds* is a social drama, with elements of *film noir* and black comedy. The fact that genre can be a negotiable term is plain in the case of *Wounds*. Some critics saw Dragojevic's film as “ironic play on genre” with elements of surrealism and political

and gangster satire.<sup>1</sup> The film was also characterized as “americanized genre-riffing” and was compared to Tarantino style movies.<sup>2</sup> Satirical representation of the new Serbian patriotism and “the ethics of killing”<sup>3</sup>, are issues that the film deals with, which put this film beyond gangster saga movies. Because the film is indirectly dealing with war, by portraying mobilization, war operations and war profiteers, it can be also classified as a war-genre film. The ideological aspects that the film portrays and their impacts on the social order and structure of society are elements that demand further consideration when identifying genre, especially when it comes to politically engaged films. *Wounds* offers almost a documentary depiction of social reality. Authentic footage from 1993 is integrated into the film narrative to express the realistic aspect of the story. These are some of the reasons why we cannot simply speak about Hollywood influences, and the difficulty of defining film genre is one of the initial issues that suggests this. In the next section we will see how this film was made and what the initial inspiration was for the director to make a story about crime in Belgrade of the 1990s.

#### 6.1.2. Making the Film

The film was made in 1998, in a co-production between Canal+ and Pandora Film, Germany. The idea for the film came out at the time when Dragojevic was considering leaving the country and after the Athens premier of *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*.<sup>4</sup> Dragojevic wrote the script in only two weeks.<sup>5</sup> The director said that he was inspired by the real conditions in society, in which crime became a dominant cultural model through the young criminals who ruled the Belgrade streets during the Milosevic regime. The director's intention was primarily to tell the story of Belgrade in the 1990s and the young generation who were most affected by the regime's politics.<sup>6</sup> The change in ideological discourse influenced social and cultural changes

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1 Grossman, Andrew: *Wounds*,  
[http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/filmreview.php?issue=may2002&id=789&section=film\\_rev](http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/filmreview.php?issue=may2002&id=789&section=film_rev)

2 Grossman, Andrew: *Ibid*.

3 See chapter 5.

4 Goran Bjelogrić, credits, DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

5 Goran Bjelogrić, credits, DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

6 See Srdjan Dragojevic, credits, DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

which in turn created the specific culture of Milosevic's Serbia, the culture of the 1990s, famous for the appearance of criminals who were dictating new values. Such a portrayal of reality required authentic heroes, actors who were a part of this culture. For the roles of Pinki and Kraut, from five thousand candidates Dragojevic chose young Dusan Pekic (Pinki) and Milan Maric (Kraut), boys who had no previous acting experience.<sup>7</sup> The authenticity of having real boys from the street proved to be decisive for the director and successful for the film. The director wanted to make a story that would reflect elements from real life as much as possible. For the same reason, there is no catharsis at the end of the film and no salvation for the main characters because that would not match the reality of that time.<sup>8</sup>

The team of Cobra Film, together with Dragojevic had to search for independent, private sponsors. The film also received financial help from the Serbian Ministry of Culture, to whom the director “presented a fake script”<sup>9</sup> in order to raise the money. The associate producer of the film was Aleksandar Avramovic editor of the Radio Television of Serbia, TV RTS. Post production of the film was done in Athens. The film was completed within 78 shooting days costing approximately \$800,000.<sup>10</sup> It was not well received by politicians who tried to obstruct the distribution of the film that nevertheless became a block buster.<sup>11</sup> The film had significant success in the former Yugoslav republics, and was also screened at international film festivals.<sup>12</sup>

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7 Pekic and Maric are representatives of the Milosevic era generation who grew up in a period of isolation and sanctions.

8 Dusan Pekic who played the role of Pinki died in March 2000 from gun shot wounds at the age of twenty. Pekic, a youngster from Zemun (a Belgrade suburb and an area famous for crime), although never previously interested in school, after his outstanding performance in *Wounds* expressed a desire to study acting. Pekic's first and only travel abroad was to Athens for the premier of *Wounds*. See: *Odlazak Dusana Pekica*, <http://arhiva.glas-javnosti.co.yu/arhiva/2000/03/29/srpski/K00032813.shtm>; Last accessed; 23/09/2008.

9 Ramsey Nancy: *FILM; Growing Up in Belgrade With Suitably Black Humor*, The New York Times, 22/08/1999 <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9404E0DC1F39F931A1575BC0A96F958260>; Last accessed: 23/09/2008.

10 See: Ramsey Nancy: *Ibid*.

11 See Anthony Kaufman and Dave Ratzlow: *Interview: Yugoslav Filmmakers Fight A Different War, Speaking with Goran Paskaljevic and Srdjan Dragojevic*, [http://www.indiewire.com/people/int\\_Yugoslavs\\_990727.html](http://www.indiewire.com/people/int_Yugoslavs_990727.html); Last accessed: 23/09/2008.

12 <http://www.cobrafilm.com/site1/engleski.html>, Last accessed: 23/09/2008.



### 6.1.3. The Plot

The director dedicated the film to post-Tito generations, children born after Tito's death (1980) and who were growing up in Milosevic's Serbia and the system of values of the 1990s. This is a story about them but also about Serbian society during the Milosevic regime. The representatives of this so called lost generation in the film are Pinki and Kraut, two youngsters on their rise to the world of crime. Pinki and Kraut are symbols of the young, Milosevic-era generation.

The story is set in a suburb of Belgrade, among the blocks of flats, some military, built in Tito's time. The film covers several years which are connected to the most turbulent events such as the beginning of the civil war in 1991, the fall of Vukovar, the exclusion of Serbia from the international community and sanctions followed by inflation in 1993, escalation of the war in other former republics of Yugoslavia, the fall of Krajina and the period of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. In parallel with the story about two youngsters the director paints the different socio-political phases in Serbian society, from the emergence of nationalism in the early 1990s to massive demonstrations against the Milosevic regime in 1996.

The opening scene set in 1996 introduces the main characters Pinki and Kraut. The first image is a close-up of the cross hanging in youngsters' car where they sit, while outside, demonstrations against Milosevic are taking place. Pinki is the narrator of the story which is given through his personal gaze. The story starts in 1991 with a scene of Yugoslav Army tanks going to Croatia and being greeted by the exalting masses. The director depicts nationalist hysteria and the tremendous support that Milosevic had at the beginning of the 1990s. This picture however gradually changes through the film. The film shows the impacts of such politics on the growth of poverty and the rise of crime, but also the protests in 1996. For its main protagonists, Pinki and Kraut these changes come too late.

Like in *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, where the tunnel is the main site of Milan's and

Halil's childhood but also the place of their tragic ending, in *Wounds* an abandoned graveyard has a similar function. The graveyard set on the hill above the blocks of flats is a depressing site that symbolizes the youngsters' life and signifies their tragic end. The only promise of a better future that will never come for the main protagonists is written on a bill-board advertising a Yugoslav airline with the slogan : "With us, to the world". The outside world is excluded from the society of the 1990s that is isolated, self-sufficient, with a different system of values and its own rules. Pinki and Kraut are boys who learn how to play according to these new rules. The whole story is told through the character of Pinki: he is the story teller and we see the world through his eyes.

The boys enter the world of crime quite early, at the age of thirteen, impressed by their neighbour Kure (Dragan Bjelogrić), a criminal who committed robberies abroad, mostly in Germany, but who later on based his business in Belgrade and became a war-profiteer. As many other criminals of that time, Kure is a so-called *weekend-warrior*<sup>13</sup> which was common in Serbia in the 1990s. Kure, as a model of a successful criminal becomes an idol of the two boys and their teacher. Both Pinki and Kraut are of a similar background, Kraut is an orphan who lives with his grandmother and Pinki is a son of a retired officer of the former Yugoslav Army.

The main entertainment of the youngsters, and their teacher Kure is to watch a TV show together called "The Beat of the Street", whose director is Lydia, the mother of Pinki's and Kraut's friend Darko. Darko is their only friend, and a boy who desperately tries to imitate his two friends but nevertheless gets bullied by them throughout the film. "The Beat of the Street" is a TV show that hosts top criminals, who in this way receive celebrity status. The dream that the boys and their teacher share is to appear as guests one day in Lydia's show and in that way confirm themselves as class criminals.

Pinki and Kraut irrevocably grow into young criminals, while drugs and brutality

<sup>13</sup> This term was used as jargon for people who would go to the battle zones for several days in month mainly to commit robberies and other crimes.

become a part of their every day life. They abandon school and their parents do not have any control over them anymore. Their teacher, Kure, who becomes a drug addict, is murdered and Pinki and Kraut continue their criminal careers independently. Kure's murder, as it is revealed later, surprisingly is not performed by a criminal but by Darko, the third boy who wanted to become like his friends Pinki and Kraut.

At the time of the biggest economic crisis Pinki and Kraut live a privileged life style of expensive cars and easy money and become rulers of their area. Pinki and Kraut however live in a different world from their parents who are at that time struggling with galloping inflation. The desperation on the Belgrade streets is contrasted to the expensive life of the criminals. After they murder a TV journalist and proved themselves to be real tough guys, their dream finally comes true and they are invited to Lydia's TV show. Their appearance on TV represents a turning point in their life. Kraut starts a relationship with Darko's mother and TV star, Lydia, which proves at the end to be fatal for his friendship with Pinki. After their appearance in the favorite show, Pinki's father, Stojan, shocked by the revelation that his son is a criminal, first offers to join him in his activities but later on commits suicide. After this event, Pinki and Kraut become even more brutal, robbing, torturing and killing people. The transformation of the boys from suburbia into bestial criminals is complete.

Their activities put them into dangerous situations of revenge by other criminals and they decide to leave the country with the help of Lydia. Lydia who has connections in the state security provides them with false passports. After Lydia brings a passport to Pinki, Kraut overwhelmed with jealousy, shoots Pinki inflicting five wounds. Pinki survives but according to their unwritten rule, their friendship can be restored only if Pinki gives his friend five equal wounds. Kraut kills Lydia, in his own words, only "to show appreciation"<sup>14</sup> for his wounded friend.

The film ends with Pinki and Kraut in the graveyard of their childhood games, where

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14 DVD "Rane", Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

the only change is that now the billboard in the background has a new slogan, this time “democracy light.” Pinki is shooting at his friend trying to make the same five wounds, and they are making jokes with each other contemplating lost meaning and having no goal any more. Darko who wants to avenge his mother, attacks them and puts an end to Pinki's and Kraut's bloody ritual of reconciliation. The conflict of these three boys, former friends, becomes a blood bath and in the end they all die.

## 6.2. Critical Reception of the Film

In this section I discuss the critical reception of the film by both international and Serbian critics and scholars. *Wounds* was classified as a film that uses patterns of film noir.<sup>15</sup> Foreign critiques frequently compared it to *Trainspotting* and *Pulp Fiction*.<sup>16</sup> The film was widely accepted by the audience of the former Yugoslavia as a film in which Dragojevic openly criticized the Milosevic regime. In this sense, *Wounds* is surely a less controversial film than *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*. Although Dragojevic was perceived as a director who tells the story from the Serbian side, in the case of *Wounds*, he was not criticized for a lack of objectivity. The film was received with sympathy as an interesting combination of “irony, satire, surrealism, an absurdity and black humor.”<sup>17</sup> Black humor is one of the main characteristics of Dragojevic's films because it reflects life in Belgrade as “daily tragicomic, in which we developed this black humor to survive.”<sup>18</sup>

The film was the most viewed Serbian film shown in Croatia in 1999. The film had a similar reception in other former republics. It was also shown in the Sundance Festival, Berlin, Toronto, and Ljubljana Film Festivals. It received two Grand-prix awards in Stockholm and the Fipresci award in Thessaloníki.<sup>19</sup> The film won

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15 Krtsic, Igor: “Serbia's Wound Culture, Teenage Killers in Milosevic's Serbia: Srdjan Dragojevic's *Rane* (1998)”, in Andrew James Horton, ed.: *The Celluloid Tinderbox: Yugoslav screen reflections of a turbulent decade*, e-book, <http://www.kinoeye.org/03/10/celluloidtinderbox.pdf>.; Last accessed: 26/10/2008.

16 Ramsey Nancy: *Ibid.*

17 Ramsey Nancy: *Ibid.*

18 Ramsey Nancy: *Ibid.*

19 <http://www.cobrafilm.com/site1/engleski.html>

international critics' prizes at the Venice Film Festival and the European Film Awards, gaining worldwide distribution.<sup>20</sup> In Serbia, “the Serbian government tried to limit exposure of *Wounds*, forbidding publicity and creating what the director called a complete media blackout.”<sup>21</sup> “*Wounds* opened in May 1998, with a record 30,000 admissions the first week, according to *Variety*. Then state-controlled television and radio banned ads; newspapers were ordered not to list theaters screening it.”<sup>22</sup>

This film has been seen as one in which the film makers are “more interested in their own identity.”<sup>23</sup> The changing identities in the 1990s remain in the focus of Dragojevic's critical exploration of the reality of that period. Although this story of violence was recognized as self critical introspection, a number of scholars and critics failed to identify the significance of the film as a story about the regime that provided a strong criticism of society's dominant ideology. Ivana Kronja for example, argues that Serbian films, and among them *Wounds*, offered “more of a description of the state of society than a deeper explanation of its crisis.”<sup>24</sup> Although she finds that Dragojevic's film dealt with media manipulation more than any other film, Kronja concludes that Serbian films in general “fail to give an analytic insight into the mechanism of violence in the society, to trace its origins and mechanisms of cancer-like spreading.”<sup>25</sup> My aim is to demonstrate in this chapter that this film not only gave a description of the state of the society in the 1990s, but did also point to the causes of violence.

One of the most complete analysis of both Dragojevic's films was given by Igor

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20 Anthony Kaufman and Dave Ratzlow: *Ibid*.

21 “We had to struggle against that, traveling from town to town with word of mouth publicity, he says. And it worked. *Wounds* was the biggest grossing Serbian film in Belgrade after the war and the first Serbian film to reach success in the neighboring republics.” Anthony Kaufman and Dave Ratzlow: *Ibid*.

22 Ramsey Nancy: *Ibid*, 22/08/1999; Last accessed: 26/11/2008.

23 Iordanova, Dina: *Balkan Cinema in the 90s: An Overview*, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-76560786.html>

24 Kronja, Ivana: *Violence as a Cause of and a Response to Frustration: Serbian Cinema and Violence Culture, 1990-2004*, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ati/violence/v5/kronja%20paper.pdf>; Last accessed: 22/11/2008.

25 Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid*.

Krstic.<sup>26</sup> Krstic approaches the film as a cultural text in order “to provide a psychoanalytic reading of Serbian cultural self-reflection during the time of the Milosevic regime.”<sup>27</sup> Krstic reads the film as “a metaphor for a culture that is traumatized by endless war and everyday violence.”<sup>28</sup> My analysis follows Krstic's argument and in this sense I highlight the most important aspects of the Milosevic culture that are represented in the film. I suggest that these aspects provided criticism of the cultural climate of the 1990s and identified the political ideology of the Milosevic regime as being responsible for the formation of such a culture. This criticism of ideology in the film has been overlooked and not explored enough. The film criticises the main premises of the ideological discourse of the regime that generated and promoted violence as the new cultural and socio-political model.

### 6.3. Contextualization of the Characters

For further analysis of the film it is important first to situate its main characters within the 1990s socio-cultural milieu. Contextualization of the characters enables us to understand that this is not just a film about youngsters from suburbia who are by their background predisposed to become criminals, but rather a story about the regime which is the main cause of the social deviation that occurred during the 1990s. The film represents a form of self-retrospection which reveals the issue of identity crisis that came as a consequence of the break-up of Yugoslavia and the death of one ideology. This is a film about how crime emerged due to the Milosevic regime and how this affected the youngest population of this time. In this sense it is not a universal story about crime but a depiction of the criminalization of Serbian society which was a concrete consequence of the regime. Characters are a

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26 See: Krstic, Igor: *Re-thinking Serbia: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture*, <http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/krstic/> and Krstic, Igor: “Serbia's Wound Culture, Teenage Killers in Milosevic's Serbia: Srdjan Dragojevic's Rane (1998)”, in Andrew James Horton, ed.: *The Celluloid Tinderbox: Yugoslav screen reflections of a turbulent decade*, e-book, <http://www.kinoeye.org/03/10/celluloidtinderbox.pdf>; Last accessed: 19/09/2008.

27 See: Krstic, Igor: *Re-thinking Serbia: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture*, <http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/krstic/>

28 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid*, in Andrew James Horton, ed.: *Ibid*, <http://www.kinoeye.org/03/10/celluloidtinderbox.pdf>.

“stylization of real, common characters in mid-nineties Serbia.”<sup>29</sup>

The analysis of the characters is divided into three parts. First I analyze the relationship between a so-called older generation, represented mainly by Pinki's father, and youngsters represented by Pinki's and Kraut's characters. I explore their differences embodied in principal values which are shaped by the dominant political ideology of the 1990s. The next section of my analysis is devoted to the contextualization of female characters in the film, which I have divided according to the cinematic representation of the three dominant types. In the last part I discuss the representation of criminals, and how the director describes the link between organized crime and civil war.

The contextualization of the characters contributes to a fuller reading and deeper understanding of the film but also sheds light on the issues of Serbian society in the 1990s. Dragojevic is interested in an average person, in *why* and *what* drives them to certain behaviour. Although in the end Pinki and Kraut are no longer ordinary characters, they are a metaphor for the whole young generation affected by the social and political system in which to be a criminal was a popular and desirable life style. The deep crisis of Serbian society is shown through the main characters. They provide an insight into the internal issues and everyday problems of 1990s Serbia. The contextualization of the characters helps in understanding the social groups of the 1990s and also in understanding which real people they stand for as a metaphor: for example Kure and his girlfriend Suzana symbolize the warlord Arkan and his wife, the folk-singer Ceca. These are all the important aspects that will be considered in the analysis of the characters. In the next section I consider how the director depicted the conflict between the so-called old and young generations.

### 6.3.1. Fathers and Sons

Pinki and Kraut represent this new generation of young people in Serbia faced with

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<sup>29</sup> Kronja, Ivana: *Ibid.*

the collapse of the ideology of their fathers, and the rise of the new nationalist ideology. Differently from the previous generations born for example in 1970s, and who can be considered as bearers of resistance against the Milosevic regime, the post-Tito generation is usually taken as the one more shaped and indoctrinated by the values of the 1990s. They were not old enough to remember life in the former Yugoslavia, as they were children when the disintegration of Yugoslavia started with the emerging of nationalism in the late 1980s. Isolated from the outside world, raised in a time of war and economic crisis, with no chance to travel abroad, not even to the former republics, recognized now as enemy countries, the youngest population of Serbia was exposed to the cultural model of violence and brutality. The emergence of pro-war propaganda and hate speech resulted in the emergence of various forms of violence. The economic crisis and isolationist politics allowed the development of organized crime and a culture of violence, which were supported by the media, which is another issue that will be discussed later. Violence became a mode of expression and was closely connected to crime and the war. It remained a social and cultural phenomenon of the 1990s.

Crime developed in suburban areas where at an early stage of life kids from the tower blocks chose the pattern of their idols, famous criminals affirmed through public discourse. The public celebration of violence which became “a shared social space” offered to youngsters a possibility of identification with criminals, who were very often recognized by the official media as war-heroes and patriots.<sup>30</sup> The possibility of a moment of glory that this life style was offering to anonymous youngsters appeared to be more attractive than a life on the margins of society.

Pinki and Kraut are growing up in the time of the emergence of nationalism as the dominant social and political principle. Their involvement in crime develops in parallel with the rise of crime in society. The more crime becomes the dominant cultural model the more Pinki and Kraut follow this new way of life. Besides Pinki and Kraut, the director introduces us to several other characters that support and help

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<sup>30</sup> Krstic, Igor: *Re-thinking Serbia: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture*, <http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/krstic/>



in understanding the story of the two boys. Kraut lives alone with his grandmother, as indicated in the film, a Serb from Croatia, who survived World War II. In one scene she is telling the story of Ustashi atrocities during the Second World War and that she survived.<sup>31</sup> The effect of her story is accomplished by the use of black humor, the boys gives her a marijuana cigarette, which gives her story a funny upturn, she talks about Ustashi who “walk on the water while holding knives in their mouth.”<sup>32</sup> Her story is followed by a surreal scene in the background which gives it a dimension of hyperbolized mythical tale rather than describing a real life event.<sup>33</sup> More importantly, her story is a parable for the ideological discourse of the regime's media who were representing Croats as purely evil by reminding the viewer of the role that the Ustashi had in the genocide committed against Serbs during World War II.

The film devotes much more space to Pinki's parents. As is shown from the very beginning of the film, they are typical supporters of Milosevic's politics.

Pinki's father, Stojan a retired officer of the JNA (Yugoslav Army) is represented as a fan of the new leader Slobodan Milosevic. Through Stojan's character is shown the emergence of nationalism into everyday life. In an argument with his neighbor, for example, Stojan curses her for being Croat, while his wife, Pinki's mother, a typical housewife, is trying to calm him down and convince him that the neighbor is actually “one of us.” Stojan is in favour of the new political ideology, he watches the television news on RTS devotedly and openly supports the war operations. He expresses firm elation while watching the fall of Vukovar for example. Stojan is shown to be a *believer* (my italics), as a man who blindly follows his political leaders. Early in the film he is shown as a devoted communist. In the film in the scenes given in flashback we see that he named his son, Pinki, after the partisan child hero from World War II and we see him weeping over Tito's death. Back in 1991 we see Stojan putting on the wall Milosevic's picture and swearing at the neighbor, who

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31 DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

32 DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

33 Krstic, Igor: *Ibid*.

supports the opposition leader Vuk Draskovic.<sup>34</sup> Stojan's attitude represent the attitude of the majority of the population in 1991 indoctrinated by propaganda, in which the opposition was demonized and Milosevic glorified. Milosevic's picture on the wall replaced Tito's portrait. Tito's photograph now lies on the kitchen table and serves as a kind of tray: the marshal's face is half-covered with jars. Through Stojan's character, Dragojevic shows the shift of former communists to nationalists, as was done in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* with the character of Gvozden. This topic is one of the central issues identified in both Dragojevic's films and it will be discussed more in detail in the following sections. Stojan, is also depicted as a tough father, as a typical military officer who solves all problems with his son by acts of violence. He beats his son Pinki in order to stop him to hanging out with criminals. In this way violence remains a form of communication that is transmitted from father to son, and that is dominant in the whole film as a model of communication with others.

Towards the end of the film both Pinki's parents and Kraut's grandmother change their political attitudes. They do not support Milosevic any more as the political climate in Serbia changes. In the year 1995 and after Krajina fell, Stojan rapidly changes his political attitude. He calls Milosevic a traitor, and after hearing the news on television yells from his balcony "betrayal." Kraut's grandmother's reaction to the same event is different from Stojan's anger, she sits motionless in front of television. The indication that this was probably one of the crucial events causing her to change her political attitudes is given at the end of the film: Kraut reveals to Pinki that his grandma died probably because she was scared as she voted for the first time against Milosevic. The fall of Krajina in 1995 is indicated as the turning point for the political awakening of these characters. From this time, Stojan remains disillusioned with his beliefs, which gradually, together with persistent economic crises and

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34 Vuk Draskovic, a controversial political figure and writer, was a leader of the first demonstrations against Milosevic in 1991. "He became one of the founders of the political opposition when President Slobodan Milosevic allowed multi-party politics in 1990, and for much of the 1990s was seen as the most prominent opposition figure in Serbia... Yet in spite of his bitter experiences at the hands of Mr Milosevic's regime, Mr Draskovic began to move closer to the government following his electoral defeats at the end of 1997." Vuk Draskovic became a Minister for Foreign Affairs in June 2006. In the recent parliamentary elections held in may 2008 he joined the coalition "ZES- Za Evropsku Srbiju" ("For European Serbia). See: *Profile: Vuk Draskovic*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special\\_report/1998/kosovo2/316216.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1998/kosovo2/316216.stm); Last accessed: 11/08/2007.

awareness that these beliefs led his son to a criminal life, lead him to suicide.

For Stojan, supporter of Milosevic's ideology, the guilt is always somebody else's: Croats are guilty of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the civil war, Milosevic is guilty of the betrayal of Krajina; Clinton and the U.S. are guilty of the economic embargo. Stojan nevertheless never finds himself responsible for anything, and does not recognize his own role as Milosevic's supporter in the circle of misery and violence. Only when he becomes aware of it at the very end, it does not have a therapeutic or redemptive effect but a fatal outcome.

The abandonment of the political ideology of the 1990s did not result from complete political awakening and redemption of the fathers. Their abandonment of Milosevic took place because, in the words of Stojan, he “sold the holy land of Krajina”<sup>35</sup> or in other words, because after the series of defeats they come to the conclusion that Milosevic had sold Serbian national interests. This is also the reason why Milosevic lost the support of the Church later on when it became clear that he was not the leader that would unify all Serbs under one wreath as his Kosovo spectacle in 1989 had implied. Milosevic was not rejected not because he led the wars but because he did not lead them successfully.

*The fathers* (my italics) supported Milosevic in spite of the economic crisis, isolation of the country, the war and criminalization of society. After it became clear that Milosevic had abandoned the ideas of a Greater Serbia that he had promised in the late 1980s, he lost support. This is an important aspect of the film, which reveals that Milosevic lost supporters not because he led the wars but because he lost them.<sup>36</sup> This is probably one of the reasons why in contemporary Serbia the nationalist-religious ideology survived Milosevic's downfall, which shows that without a full confrontation with dangerous ideology it is not possible to truly perform the redemption of the *fathers* (my italics) nor make crucial changes in society.

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35 DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

36 See chapter 3.

The traumatic circle of fathers and sons in the film is shown as a cause-consequence effect. The belief of the fathers is proved to be fatal for the sons, who are influenced directly by the values of the ideological discourse of their fathers. In other words, the nationalist-religious ideology in society, its social and political practice of violence, led to the break down of society and its values which is represented in the sons. The sons, however, have no interest in the ideologies which indirectly shaped them through both their fathers and the dominant cultural climate. The sons are the product of populist ideology of the 1990s.

One of them is Darko, the son of Lydia, the journalist, who is desperately trying to imitate his two friends. Although Pinki and Kraut are constantly humiliating him he is nevertheless trying to become a part of the gang. Violence and brutality are at the core of their communication. Gradually the violators Pinki and Kraut turn their victim Darko into violator. The violence among the youngsters culminates at the end of the film when they kill each other.

#### 6.3.2. Female Characters

Political ideology mentioned earlier, that promoted the myths of Serbian men as brave warriors, supported the appearance of images of masculinity in the public sphere as a cultural role model of the 1990s. This resulted in development of specific forms of misogynous culture typical of this period of time. Its depiction in the film is not given just in representation of the violent men of the 1990s but also in the depiction of female characters. Sexism adopted in public discourse is shown in the portrayal of women in the film. Reintroduced religious tradition, or popular perception of religion is linked to some of the stereotypes and perceptions of women. In a sense women did not move far away from being observed as objects of pleasure or satisfaction of man's needs, sexual or domestic, which is characteristic of patriarchal societies and culture. This portrayal of femininity and women in film gives a good ground for applying a feminist approach in film theory and thus discussing the question that Ortiz addresses: "Is there a cinematic aesthetic specific

to women?”<sup>37</sup> As Tomislav Longinovic argues in his analysis of *Keg of Gunpowder*, women are “completely usurped by the enforced masculine culture” and further “their destiny is often subject to the contingencies of male bonding.”<sup>38</sup> In this section we will look at typologization of female characters in *Wounds*, which can be identified as three types dominant for the main stream culture of the 1990s.

The first is the type of traditional mother and housewife, represented by Pinki's mother. In her world the man is the head of the house, to whom she is subordinated. She does not make crucial decisions but follows the male leader, her husband Stojan. Her major role is to fulfill her duties but she has no real authority, not even over her own child. Although she is the stronghold of the house her voice is not important, as the Balkan patriarchal culture proposes. She is a typical mother and housewife, in the patriarchal tradition in Serbia, whose role had been preserved in spite of the interruption that communist ideology brought in Yugoslavia after the Second World War.

The second type is a woman who is only seemingly independent and has a career. I call this type seemingly independent because her emancipation is not complete, she is still in fact subordinated to the man's world in which she has to play according to certain rules. Her biggest attribute remains her sexuality. This is embodied in the character of Lydia, a local star. Lydia is a single working, and what might be called independent mother. However her independence is subverted through her dependence on the man's world, politicians, criminals and institutions of the regime with which she obviously has connections. Lydia's character suggests that she accomplished most things through sexual relationships and at the same time she is portrayed as a person attracted to violence and brutality. She is a deliberate servant of violence in the tough masculine world of decadence which makes of her a local star among young criminals. Lydia is a heroine of the masculine world of war and crime

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37 Ortiz Gaye: *Woman as Spectacle: Theological Perspectives on Women and Film* in Christopher Deacy and Gaye Williams Ortiz: *Theology and Film: Challenging the Sacred/ Secular Divide*, Blackwells: Oxford, 2008, p.91

38 Longinovic, Z. Tomislav: *Playing the Western Eye: Balkan Masculinity and Post-Yugoslav War Cinema* in Imre, Aniko: *East European Cinemas*, Routledge: New York, London, 2005, p. 45.

and she deliberately embraces her role ending up as a victim being finally violated by Kraut, a boy who never reaches full maturity in the film but nevertheless embodies the so called masculinity model of the 1990s.

The third type is a typical sponsored girl popularly called *sponzorusa*, who is depicted in the character of a turbo-folk singer and a girlfriend of criminal Kure, Suzana. Suzana is a metaphor for the silicone girls, usually girlfriends of criminals, also called businessmen in a local jargon, who could offer them a luxurious and rich lifestyle. This lifestyle was a part of popular culture of the 1990s and very often promoted by the regime's entertainment media such as TV Pink and through the folk singers who became celebrities. *Sponzoruse* are the cultural phenomenon that emerged in the 1990s with the collapse of Serbian society. This is connected to the stratification of society and the melting of the middle class. The economic crisis during the embargo and isolation of the country caused division in the population between extremely rich and poor. This problem and its depiction in the film will be discussed separately later. The subversive representation of sponsored girls reveals not only the cultural collapse but also the degradation of the idea of emancipation. Emancipation in the 1990s stood for rich marriage rather than for education and employment.

The system of values changed with the establishment of Milosevic's culture, promoted by media and embodied in turbo-folk music and violence. Milosevic's culture is depicted as a deviated concept of both Western modernism and Eastern traditionalism. In this specific cultural context the West is perceived through the symbols of capitalist commodities. In the film it is depicted through the youngsters' obsession with Versace suits and BMW cars.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand patriarchal culture was dominating through the populist interpretation of Orthodoxy, affirmation of masculinity in myths, nationalism and finally the perception of women as a mother-housekeeper on one side and woman as a female, an object of satisfaction. In contrast to Tito's period, for example, when one of the dominant ideals for women was to

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<sup>39</sup> See Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

receive higher education or find a job and gain their independence, in the 1990s a patriarchal model returns in a new form. This new form proposed the image of the successful woman as the one married to a rich person. This was mainly promoted through the emergence of turbo-folk music whose representative was a turbo-folk diva Svetlana-Ceca Raznatovic who was married to criminal and warlord Zeljko Raznatovic Arkan. Suzana's character stands also as a symbol for this folk-diva but also the values embodied in turbo-folk iconography of the 1990s, which will be discussed later.

The female characters are subordinated to the masculine culture formed in the 1990s. Re-christianization of Serbian society, which went hand in hand with the politics of the 1990s supported this misogynist stereotypes.<sup>40</sup> The populist version of Orthodoxy contributed to the perception of woman as a mother and a shelter for the Serbian warrior.<sup>41</sup>

### 6.3.3. Criminals and War Profiteers

Through the representation of one of the main characters in the film, Kure, the director paints the interconnection between organized crime and the civil war. Kure, a criminal who introduces Pinki and Kraut into the world of crime belongs to the so-called older generation of criminals, like the warlord Arkan, who developed their criminal careers mostly by committing different sorts of crime abroad.<sup>42</sup> The criminals of former Yugoslavia, such as Arkan, were famous for robberies and

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40 I call the process of the 1990s re-christianization because a significant number of people were baptized or married in the Church. During Tito's Yugoslavia, the number of baptisms decreased, while marriages were mostly civil. With the return to the Church in the early 1990s a number of Christian practices was performed and even promoted as desirable practice in the media. Religion, religious customs, practices and belief became a part of cultural landscape and mediascape.

41 See Radovic, Milja: *Images of Women in Serbian Media*, 6/09/2005, WACC Media Development, [www.wacc.org.uk](http://www.wacc.org.uk); Last accessed: 15/09/2008.

42 Arkan had "convictions for bank robbery in Belgium, Holland and Germany, and arrest warrants in Sweden and Italy...Raznatovic escaped from jails in Belgium and Holland, an achievement which many feel was linked to his employment by the Yugoslav state security. The Belgrade press later reported that Raznatovic worked as a government hitman, targeting troublesome Yugoslav emigres abroad." *Gangster's Life of Serbian Warlord*, Saturday, 15 January, 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/605266.stm>; Last accessed: 11/6/2008.

organized crime in countries of western Europe, such as Germany or Sweden. With the break-up of Yugoslavia these criminals were re-activated and worked for the State Security.

The difference between the old and young generation, as shown in the film, was in their local myth about “code of honor” to which Kure nostalgically refers to throughout the film remembering “the good old times.”<sup>43</sup> This code involved a respect for teachers on which older criminals insisted, while the younger generation of criminals was perceived as disrespectful. This disrespect was reflected in the readiness of youngsters to assassinate their teachers which Pinki describes as the way of “graduating in this job.”<sup>44</sup> This depiction of the myth of the Serbian underground and the so-called the change of code and how the young criminals escaped the control of their teachers is described also in the film *Rage*.<sup>45</sup> Epic violence that started with the political use of the *Kosovo Myth*, affirmed in the 1990s, produced a celebration of violence in the public sphere. Violence for the sake of violence as an uncontrollable force in Belgrade streets came as a consequence of criminalization of society on all levels.

The public celebration of violence was performed by the media through the glorification of criminals as war heroes. The media gave such criminals the status of celebrities. Dragojevic depicts this by portraying the character of Kure as a criminal but at the same time as a war profiteer. Kure goes to the battle zones to return with a truck overloaded with different goods. Kure's funeral however gives the most significant picture of how gangsters were celebrated at the same time as patriots. In the funeral speech, the other criminal Pepper gives almost an epic tribute to Kure describing him as a “patriot” who in “the worst time for Serbs” decided to take a weapon and go to “defend the homes and tombs of our elders.”<sup>46</sup> Using mythological language that was a way of expression in the 1990s he calls Kure a “patriot made of

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43 DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

44 DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

45 See Chapter 4.

46 DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.



the stuff of knights.”<sup>47</sup> The funeral of Kure was according to the Christian Orthodox practice and the whole scene gives an impression of the burial of a national hero rather than that of a criminal. Only the crowd gathered in the graveyard and their bizarre conversation reveals that it is the funeral of a criminal, a common occurrence in Belgrade in the 1990s.

The whole funeral turns into a media spectacle when Lydia arrives with a TV crew to film the ceremony. Since she arrives late she asks the grave diggers to dig out the grave so she can shoot at least something. The bizarreness of the scene signifies the political importance that crime, violence and patriotism played in Milosevic's media. Ironically, Arkan, the untouchable king of the underground was shot and killed in January 2000, less than two years after *Wounds* was made, and his funeral turned into another media spectacle.

#### **6.4. Representation of Nationalist-Religious Ideology and its Impacts on Serbian Society**

In this section I discuss the cinematic depiction of the political ideology of the 1990s and its impact on society. Dragojevic paints the political ideology of Slobodan Milosevic as a nationalist-religious ideology, promoted through a populist discourse that was rooted in national and religious myths. In the first section I focus on the director's depiction of the beginning of the war and the rise of nationalism. In the second part, I look at the representation of national symbols and religious images in the film. I discuss how the director uses these representations to describe the ideological discourse and metaphorically to express the values of Milosevic's culture.

In the last section I analyze the cinematic representation of media propaganda and its importance for the regime's politics. I explore how the film depicts the interconnection between the economic collapse, formation of the so-called turbo-folk culture and the new system of values. *Wounds* more than any other film made in the

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47 DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

1990s investigates the 1990s culture as a product of the dominant political ideology.

#### 6.4.1. The Rise of Nationalism and the Beginning of the War

What happened in Serbia in the phase of transition from socialism to capitalism was the emergence of nationalism and fascism as a shock absorber for the sudden exposure of capitalist alienation and deterritorialization—a desire to recuperate the lost sense of community and shared sociality qua identification with the nation as the source of stable identities.<sup>48</sup>

The film starts with a depiction of nationalist euphoria in 1991. The opening sequence shows the masses of people on the streets of New Belgrade who are greeting the tanks of the Yugoslav Army, JNA, which are leaving for war operations in Croatia. Two thirteen year olds, Pinki and Kraut, are at a graveyard where they are bullying their friend Darko, calling him a Croat and a Shiptar, which in local jargon is a name for Kosovo Albanians. They are running around the tombs while the camera shows names inscribed on the gravestones in both Cyrillic and Latin scripts, suggesting ironically that Belgrade traditionally had a mixed population, which the young generation, influenced by the new ideology, are ignorant about.

At the sound of the tanks the youngsters leave the graveyard to join the masses and greet the army. The next scene shows people who are greeting the army with the symbolic three fingers raised, toasting with a traditional drink rakija and dancing to nationalist songs played on trumpets. Hegemony that was completed through the nationalist-religious ideology offered a new sense of identity and unity, which the film shows as a psychotic celebration of the beginning of the war. The scene suggests that this political ideology represents the beginning of a circle of violence that became a daily occurrence. The characters of Pinki and Kraut are used in the film narrative as the link between crime and the emergence of nationalism and the escalation of the war.

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<sup>48</sup> Krstic, Igor: *Ibid.*

While *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* is more the story of the war, *Wounds* focuses more upon the consequences of the war for Serbian society. Both films tell one story about the political ideology of the 1990s and its impacts. Dragojevic makes this connection not only by focusing upon the same topic and similar problems but also by repeating certain lines and images from *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. For example, in the opening scene of *Wounds* with the Yugoslav Army tanks, appears the same actor from *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, Velimir Bata Zivojinovic. In *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* he plays Gvozden, an ex-colonel of the former Yugoslav Army, while in *Wounds* he appears just briefly in the introduction of the film, on the tank as a colonel of the Yugoslav Army that is going to war. In that way, the film might give an impression that this is the same character in both films. Similarly the same music appears in both films as a signifier of the popularization of nationalism, for example in the scene with tanks the same melody of “who says, who lies that Serbia is small” is repeated as in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*.<sup>49</sup>

Portraits of the leaders, such as Tito and Milosevic, have a similar role in both of the films. They signify the ideological background of the characters, such as is the case with Nazim<sup>50</sup> in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. In *Wounds* pictures of the leaders in the context of the scenes where they appear suggest the death of one ideology and rise of the other one. For example, the scene where Tito's picture is being replaced with a picture of Slobodan Milosevic on the wall in Pinki's house, reveals the ideological shift that took place in society. The rise of nationalism in the early 1990s is depicted through the celebration of the new leader Milosevic and a new political ideology. The support given to war operations equally by masses on the streets and Pinki's father Stojan is a continuation of the nationalist euphoria shown in the introduction of the film. Dragojevic draws the transformation of a former socialist society into a culture of wounds where violence, propaganda and kitsch became principal by-products of the new ideology.<sup>51</sup>

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49 See Chapter 5.

50 See Chapter 5.

51 See Krstic Igor: Ibid in Horton, Andrew: *Ibid*.

#### 6.4.2. Religious Images and Nationalist Symbols in the Film

Dragojevic uses similar images in both films to illustrate the political ideology of the 1990s. These images symbolize the values of Milosevic's Serbia. In the opening sequence of *Wounds*, the camera focuses on the fist with three fingers raised, an image that also appears in *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*. This was a nationalist populist greeting that was revived in the 1990s and traditionally symbolizes a belonging to the Serbian Orthodox nation. It stands as a symbol of both national and religious identity. The image of *chetniks* in the same scene suggests the emergence of nationalism and pseudo-history into the public discourse. The *chetnik* movement, declared first as a royalist army in World War II, later to develop into a Serbian nationalist paramilitary, was banned in Tito's Yugoslavia for its collaboration with fascists.<sup>52</sup> The rehabilitation of the *chetnik* movement in the 1990s proclaimed as redressing historical injustice nonetheless had political goals. It strengthened nationalism and supported the arguments of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts of Yugoslavia as an artificial state that was unjust only in the Serbian case.<sup>53</sup> The *chetniks'* flag "With Faith in God - Freedom or Death", appears in both films. In *Wounds* this flag flies among flags of Yugoslavia with the symbol of the red star, which people are waving to greet the Yugoslav Army. Mixed flags show the absurdity of a populist ideology built on nationalism which was at the same time justifying the war as a fight for the maintenance of Yugoslavia.

The image of a cross with four "s" shown in *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, appears also in the *Wounds* as graffiti on the door in the corridor where Kure is killed.<sup>54</sup> The meaning of this symbol has been discussed in the previous chapter and has the same purpose of painting the dominant iconography of the 1990s as a background to the story. Crosses and icons became a modern iconography of Serbian society and Dragojevic depicts this emergence of religious images in the public sphere in both of

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<sup>52</sup> See Glenny, Misha: *The Balkans, 1804-1999: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*, London: Granta, 1999.

<sup>53</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>54</sup> See chapter 5.

his films. Although in the Serbian socio-political context these images expressed what David Morgan refers to as “symbolic rather than sacramental ideas”<sup>55</sup> their symbolism in the public sphere represented a populist attempt at sacralization of the nation.

The image of an Orthodox cross appears frequently in *Wounds*. The film starts with a close up of the cross, which becomes one of the central images of *Wounds*. There are several possible interpretations of the function of this image in the film. The image of the cross around the neck of young criminals reveals the 1990s fashion of being a nationalist and an Orthodox Serb. In this way the symbol of the cross became a central symbol of the kitsch universe, which is sublimated in the *mise-en-scene*.<sup>56</sup> Further as Igor Krstic argues, the cross stands as a symbol of death itself to which the film makes many references.<sup>57</sup> The image of a golden cross symbolizes a corrupted Christianity, embodied in nationalist-religious ideology, where a symbol of compassion, love and suffering turns into its antithesis. In the context of *Wounds* the cross symbolizes death itself with no resurrection. Pinki and Kraut are the *collateral damage* (my italics) of the 1990s politics. Pinki and Kraut are, similarly to anti-heroes in Dragojevic's previous film, final victims of “the death of a traditional value system.”<sup>58</sup>

An image of the *Last Supper* is a part of film's *mise-en-scene*.<sup>59</sup> It appears as a big picture that hangs on the wall behind Pinki, Kraut and Kure, who sit together while they are watching “The Beat of the Street.” The *Last Supper* emphasizes the antipode of this Christian image and indicates unity in blood of the teacher Kure and his disciples Pinki and Kraut. Unity in blood and death as the central image of *Wounds* has exactly the opposite meaning from what this Christian iconography represents.

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55 Morgan, David: *Ibid*, p. 240.

56 Paraphrased, Srdjan Vucinic: *Putovanje na kraj noci. Rane Srdjana Dragojevic*, Rec 46 (June 1998) quoted in Krstic Igor: “Serbia's Wound Culture, Teenage Killers in Milosevic's Serbia: Srdjan Dragojevic's Rane (1998)”, in Andrew James Horton, ed.: *The Celluloid Tinderbox: Yugoslav screen reflections of a turbulent decade*, e-book, <http://www.kinoeye.org/03/10/celluloidtinderbox.pdf>

57 See Krstic, Igor: *Ibid*, in Andrew James Horton, ed.: *Ibid*.

58 See Krstic, Igor: *Ibid*.

59 See krstic, Igor: *Ibid*.

Another image that appears in the film is a logo of the Red Star football club. Although this logo is not an explicitly nationalist symbol its meaning in the context of the early 1990s provides a strong nationalist connotation. At the beginning of the film Kraut wears a t-shirt with their logo, while in the next scene Pinki wears a scarf of the Red Star. The Red Star logo indicates the link between football and nationalist politics that existed in the early 1990s. The Red Star leader, Zeljko Raznatovic Arkan, was also working for the regime and the State Security (DB - Drzavna bezbednost) which rehabilitated many of the former criminals among whom Arkan was the most famous. He was one of the organizers of the first paramilitary formations that later on participated in many combats in Croatia and Bosnia. Arkan was given the status of a celebrity in the Milosevic media. In *Wounds* Dragojevic continues to explore media propaganda and he pays special attention to such negative media influences.

#### 6.4.3. Theme of Media Propaganda

In *Wounds* much more space is devoted to the role of Milosevic's media in the 1990s than in any other film of that time. The director considers several different aspects on regime's media during the 1990s. First, the film depicts the media as the main tool of war propaganda. Second, Milosevic's media are depicted as promoters of violence and the trash culture of the 1990s. And third, the film shows how the perception of Milosevic's media varied through the years. The audiences' response to media content shifted from unquestionable acceptance to massive protest. We will look at how each of these segments are represented in the film.

Throughout the film, the National Television – RTS News is depicted as the regime's blatant vehicle for war propaganda. The same text that the RTS journalist reads in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* is repeated in *Wounds*.<sup>60</sup> Dragojevic continually

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60 “Once again history is repeating itself. Raging hordes of evil have risen against the entire Serbian people. Ustahi, foreigners and fanatics of Allah's Jihad with Mohamed's flag in their hands and swords...just as they did fifty years ago, they are attacking poorly armed Serbian defenders...their children will not be the victims of Croatian fascism, assisted by world powers, with intentions to draw a new map of Europe and create a monster with a forbidding name: The New World Order!” DVD “Pretty Village Pretty Flame”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2001.

ridicules media propaganda in different ways. In one scene Pinki is masturbating in the toilet while his father is listening to RTS war propaganda. Also the introduction of the RTS TV News is changed in the film and, instead of the globe, Dragojevic puts an image of the earth as the flat model carried by turtles. In a similar fashion Dragojevic adds to the commentary of the RTS TV journalist a folk-song “nobody can do anything to us, we are stronger than destiny”, that in the words of TV propagandist embodies our “people's wisdom.”<sup>61</sup> Official media propaganda is ridiculed and represented in the film as a war machinery of lies whose main purpose was indoctrination of citizens and the creation of an isolationist and self-sufficient xenophobic culture.

Pinki's father, who represents the so-called average citizen in the film, imbibes media propaganda and watches TV news giving his support to the war. In one of the scenes he is watching a decimated Vukovar on TV, which is actually authentic documentary footage. Only at the end the film do we see a change of attitude towards Milosevic's media: we see Pinki's mother, taking part in a protest against Milosevic's media, hitting a pot on her balcony together with other neighbors at the time when the main TV news on RTS starts. This change however comes too late for Pinki and Kraut, who describe the demonstrations against Milosevic at the end of the film as a “rebellion of mice.”

Unlike in *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, in this film Dragojevic goes a step further and depicts the role of Milosevic's media in the promotion of the culture of violence. This is shown through the representation of the TV show symbolically called “The Beat of the Street” (*Puls Asfalta*) which has great influence on Pinki and Kraut, whose dream is to appear in the same show which hosted many of their idols from the world of crime. Lydia the director of this show is a local celebrity among youngsters, the devoted audience of this program. She is also creating celebrities out of people who have proved their status in the underground.<sup>62</sup> Lydia is shown to be connected both to the state security and criminals, which signifies the close link between regime's

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61 DVD “Rane”, Beograd: Cobra Film, 2002.

62 A similar TV show was screened in TV Politika and BK television, stations closely connected to the regime, and was called Crni Biseri.

media, criminals and the state institutions during the Milosevic regime. Popularization of crime and criminals by the media has great influence on youngsters whose views and values are shaped by the Milosevic culture of destruction and decadence. *Wounds* stands out as a unique film of the 1990s as one which dealt with the Milosevic media and provided a critical depiction of media propaganda of the 1990s and the influence it had in the socio-political and cultural sphere.

#### 6.4.4. Economic collapse, Turbo-folk and the System of Values

The film portrays the economic collapse of society to be a consequence of criminalization, and international isolation of the country under Milosevic's dominion. Economic sanctions only contributed to the stratification of society and the melting of the middle class. The galloping inflation in 1993, the collapse of state firms and unemployment strengthen the regime and the development of the black market. Most of the citizens of Serbia were forced to find alternative ways to support their families. Empty shops and queues for bread and oil became an every day picture of Milosevic's Serbia. To provide an authentic picture of this time Dragojevic uses original documentary footage from 1993 that shows people in one of the Belgrade queues fighting over the loaves of bread.

In these circumstances, with a new elite that consisted of criminals, the young generation turned towards an easy money life-style finding the way of their parents not relevant any more. The system of values promoted by the media included a glamorous life style which did not match reality. The new system of values is embodied in the song that Suzana, Kure's girlfriend, sings in the film and that is devoted to "bank-notes." Similarly to *Cabaret's* song "money makes the world go around", Suzana, obviously without any talent for singing, performs a song about how money makes everything possible in life. This bizarre scene suggests the decadence of the new life style and turning Serbia into a "cabaret Balkans"<sup>63</sup>, an isolated place ruled by the Milosevic family. The degradation of 1990s Serbia can be

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<sup>63</sup> Film of Goran Paskaljevic. For more details see chapter 4.



compared to cinematic depictions of decadence in German society at the rise of World War II.

Western brands became a norm of this life style, in an economically exhausted Serbia. Versace clothes and BMW cars became a matter of status among criminals also called “new businessmen.” Pinki who watches his father repairing his old car or counting bank notes totaling billions of dinars that have no worth and can no longer buy even the basics, turns towards Kure as a symbol of the fast and dangerous life style that offers Western luxuries. During the 1990s, in the time of xenophobia and nationalism, paradoxically, goods and values from the Western market were promoted. In an isolated Serbia, Western goods and brands became a norm and a matter of social status. The market in that sense proved to be stronger than nationalist ideology. Furthermore depiction of these social images of status can be read as a prophetic vision of global perspectives of the new free market region that will develop on the ruins of former Yugoslavia.

This was the time that saw the rise of the phenomenon of sponsored girls, sponzoruse, who were often but not necessarily turbo-folk singers. The so called sponsors of these girls were usually new businessmen, who were capable of offering them a different life style from the one they had with their parents. Suzana, first Kure's girlfriend, but later a girlfriend of other criminals, is a drug addict and folk-singer. She symbolizes this female role model of Milosevic's culture, promoted through Milosevic's media such as TV Pink, a bearer of trash culture.<sup>64</sup> Turbo folk music is a symbol of the trash culture, which is defined as “an aggressive nationalist adaptation of pop culture used as a generator of a nationalist-consumerist mode of 'Serbness'.”<sup>65</sup> Turbo-folk music and its representatives conceptualized and visualized the ideological and cultural values of the time, and thus legitimized the political extremism of the 1990s.

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<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>65</sup> Monroe, Alexei: *Balkan hardcore, Pop Culture and Paramilitarism*, Central Europe Review, Vol 2, No 24, 19 June, 2000, <http://www.ce-review.org/00/24/monroe24.html>; Last accessed: 1/10/2008.

## 6.5. Conclusion

*Wounds* is a film that primarily deals with the Milosevic regime and the concrete consequences that it left on Serbian society. In this chapter I argued that by deconstructing and analyzing the film narrative and then contextualizing it in the socio-political milieu of the 1990s, we see that the film offers not only a retrospective on what happened in Serbia but also offers a critical observation of a specific political system and the consequences it left on society. In other words, Dragojevic portrays crime and violence as a byproduct of the emergence of nationalism. A new political discourse affirmed pro-war propaganda, which influenced the formation of the specific cultural model of the 1990s. The Serbian culture of the 1990s can be identified as a culture of *thanatos*, which the graveyard, as the main setting in the film, suggests. Many factors certainly contributed to the development of this culture of death: the political use of the *Kosovo Myth*, portrayals of the victimization of Serbs by the media and open attacks on others, insisting on nationhood and religiousity as one entity, representation of the war as holy and righteous. In the Serbian cultural milieu criminals and war profiteers were established as popular icons of the 1990s. In this way various criminal activities, from war profiteering to political assassinations, all became legitimate political practice.

In such a situation, the stratification of society was inevitable. It came as a consequence of the economic blockade which in fact only strengthened the regime and supported the development of crime, corruption and the black market. Isolation of the country made an atmosphere of collective apathy and depression. On the other hand the so-called Serbian elite close to the regime spread the ideas that the whole world was against Serbia, which was fighting this “new world order.”<sup>66</sup> Turbo-folk culture imposed new values promoted by TV celebrities who were often criminals or connected to them. This new culture supported the ongoing process of criminalization of society and promotion of nationalism, xenophobia, intolerance and

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<sup>66</sup> See chapter 3.

brutality.

The circle of violence and destruction of Serbian society starts with the emergence of the political ideology of Slobodan Milosevic. Media manipulation is shown to be one of the most important mechanisms for the creation of the dominant culture of violence. How violence emerged into the public discourse Dragojevic describes through his depiction of the regime's media who were overwhelmed with pro-war propaganda and images of criminals who were often given celebrity status and thus became new cultural role models. The film makes reference to the connection between crime and the regime.

*Wounds* is a film which provides a unique approach to the theme of violence and criminalization of Serbian society. The film successfully framed one of the most difficult socio-political periods in recent Serbian history showing how a story of violence and crime, was directly connected to local ideologies. Unlike any other film made on this topic, *Wounds* shows that everyday brutality, civil war and crime are really the story of the regime. In other words, crime and violence are not phenomena that stand alone, but are shown to be part of the wider story of the political ideology of the 1990s. Pinki and Kraut's street story of crime is only a consequence of all these elements linked together. The film's cinematic exploration of Pinki and Kraut's self-deception offers a rich insight into the main issues of 1990s Serbia. The film shows how the emergence of a new political ideology had concrete consequences in the formation of a culture of violence and criminalization of society. The disintegration of Serbian society can therefore be read as the final result of the nationalist-religious ideology formed in the late 1980s. Political ideology is at the root of the social and cultural changes, which as I argued in this chapter, the director suggests throughout the film.

I also suggested that the complex film narrative informs us in more depth about the background of the problems shown in the film. The representation of political ideology in the film highlights the fact that nationalist-religious discourse was one of the main causes for the erosion of Serbian society.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

#### **7.0. Introduction**

In this thesis I have investigated the cinematic representations of nationalist-religious ideology in several Serbian films made during the 1990s. I explored how films can inform us about the ideological discourse of the Milosevic regime and its impacts on Serbian society. In this study I therefore investigated representations of religion and nationalism in the films, as the main elements of the political ideology of the 1990s. My intention was to investigate the subversive potential of these cinematic representations in order to answer the question whether subversiveness is possible if films speak within the specific ideological context in which they were made.

My study showed that, by telling a story of ordinary people, the Serbian films addressed some of the fundamental issues in Serbian society. I argued that several films of the 1990s provided a form of political and ideological critique by subverting some of the main ideological premises of the Milosevic regime. In this chapter I discuss the results of my analysis, and further developments that arise from this study. First of all I summarize and outline the results of my analysis of the selected Serbian films. There follows a discussion of the cinematic subversiveness of the Serbian films analyzed. Here I discuss why the cinematic representations outlined in the previous section can be considered as subversive representations of the nationalist-religious ideology. After the final remarks I finally outline the contributions this study has made and future research that can be developed on the basis of this thesis.

## **7.1. What do the Films Reveal about their Sociocultural and Political Context and How do they Inform us about the Ideological Discourse of the 1990s?**

The aim of this section is to summarize how the Serbian films act as cultural texts connected with the context in which they were made, and in that sense what they said about this context and the dominant ideological discourse. This part of my concluding chapter is based on discussions from previous chapters and analysis of films and their context.

In chapter 3 of this thesis I discussed the Serbian socio-political context of the 1990s and I explained the main characteristics and impacts of the nationalist-religious ideology and the promotion of this ideological discourse in the public sphere. The aim of chapter 3 was to provide an ideological context for the Serbian films under discussion. At the same time an understanding of the context contributed to the analysis of the films. In chapters 4, 5 and 6, I analysed several Serbian films investigating how they pictured Serbian society and what these depictions say about the ideological constructs of the Milosevic regime. I argued that the Serbian films did not just “mirror” the ideological discourse but on the contrary they investigated the dominant ideology and its impacts on the so-called ordinary people and on society in general. This investigation often revealed a critical view of the reality of the 1990s and showed that the films subverted some of the ideological premises of the regime. In the next sections I outline the major findings based on my film analysis.

### **7.1.1. Serbian Films as Parabolic Stories about Society**

The discussion of the *Kosovo Myth* and its political use, in chapter 3, was useful for understanding the references that films make to this myth as a crucial part of the 1990s ideological discourse. We saw that the film about the battle of Kosovo was screened at the beginning of a time of national euphoria, in 1989, and that the author of the text, Ljubomir Simovic, an academic, strongly supported Milosevic's new

political program.<sup>1</sup> Observed outside of the specific socio-political context, this film could appear purely as a historical spectacle which deals with one of the most famous Serbian epics, but when we contextualize it, we can see its political implications. This example illustrates how the film was used as a tool of political propaganda. In this sense this film represents a useful resource for understanding the ideological discourse of the Milosevic Serbia, since the film uses the *Kosovo Myth* to communicate the major postulates of the nationalist-religious ideology.

Most of the 1990s films discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis, were influenced and inspired by the Yugoslav collapse and the outbreak of the war. All the films analysed were telling the story of people in Milosevic's Serbia. In this sense they offered an inside perspective on the ongoing issues in Serbian society. This so-called Serbian perspective often included the director's personal views on some of the important issues, such as the question of identity within the new ideological context for example. The films of the 1990s showed various problems of Serbian society and highlighted different aspects of the Milosevic regime. The dark picture of Serbia and the depressing atmosphere which prevails in the 1990s films reflects the social reality. The films dealt with ongoing issues differently from Milosevic propagandist media, which were constantly providing a false picture of reality, as previously discussed: the regime's media were depicting a glamorous style of life while in reality a crisis was taking place.<sup>2</sup>

The films depicted various socio-political problems and covered different aspects of Serbian society, focusing on issues such as the increase of crime and violence, economic crisis, degradation of values, and alienation of individuals, all of which were the consequences of isolation of the country ruled by Milosevic's regime. Each of these films has a different approach to the subject and provides a different angle on the issues explored. For example two films that both painted the problem of

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 4 for more details.

<sup>2</sup> The verse of one turbo-folk song best illustrates the message that the regime was sending through its TV stations such as TV Pink. The singer sings about the difficulties of life, but concludes that it is not actually too bad and that it could be worse, while the whole song has a fast upbeat rhythm. See chapters 3 and 4 for more details.

violence, such as *Rage* and *Keg of Gunpowder*, are constructed in completely different ways.<sup>3</sup> While *Rage* illustrates the brutality of street violence without giving any additional explanation of the causes of the violence, and thus leaves an impression of just “mirroring” the existing situation, *Keg of Gunpowder* explores violence as a consequence of isolation and the war on ordinary people who, trapped in this circle, become violators.

The most common theme exploited in films however was the civil war. The majority of films reviewed which dealt with the war themes, tended to question the war and the violence from a moral and ethical standpoint, while the media propaganda on the other hand tended to justify the war as a “sacred mission” of the Serbian people, based on the *Kosovo Myth*. The cinematic representation of the war often included the depiction of the role of mythological discourse in justification of the war. *Premeditated Murder*, discussed in chapter 4, is a case in point since it deals with the local ideologies and their impact on the people. Even the controversial film *Underground*, is useful for understanding the ideological discourse of its time: while the film is trying to discuss the issue of ideology, it is at the same time reflecting some of the ideological premises of the 1990s.

To sum up, the films of the 1990s inform us about the socio-political context of their time by addressing fundamental issues in society. The films framed the ideological premises of the Serbian political regime but some of them also reflected the stereotypes and ideological concepts of their time. Because of this ambiguous character of the films and in order to better understand their complexity I suggest that Serbian films can be divided into three categories. In the first category I would place the films which critically depicted the political ideology of the regime and in which directors critically explored some of the ideological premises of the 1990s, such as Orthodoxy and nationalism. In the second category are the films which were shaped by the political context and which therefore reflected some of the ideological assumptions of the regime, which would be the case in the film *The Battle of Kosovo*.

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter 4.

In the third category would be the films which tended to do both: to critically explore the political-ideological context of the 1990s but at the same time to be influenced by it, the film *Underground*, for example. I argue that most of the films explored would belong to this third category. However, it is important to say that whichever of these categories a film belongs to I argue that it can still significantly inform us about its socio-political context and as such represents a useful resource for studying the ideological discourse of the 1990s. The majority of films explored express ambiguity, and for this reason they might be considered as belonging to the third category. This is a complex problem and it will be further considered in this chapter as a part of my discussion on cinematic subversiveness. In the next part I discuss in detail the results of my analysis of the films and their depiction of nationalist-religious ideology, which forms the core of this thesis.

#### 7.1.2. Cinematic Representation of Nationalist-Religious Ideology

Among the films discussed in this study I chose the two Dragojevic films as those which offered the most significant portrayal of ideology both as the background but also as an inseparable part of the main story. Both *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* and *Wounds* are strongly connected to the socio-political context in Serbia. They depict some of the crucial problems of the time in which they were made. The first film deals with the war while the second explores the problems of crime and violence. My analysis shows that besides these dominant topics the films reveal a lot about the background of the problems explored. They inform us about Serbian society and its ideological discourse of the 1990s. In fact of all the films of the 1990s they portrayed best the main characteristics of this political ideology by representing its core elements. Nationalist and religious symbols and references in the films show that the films portrayed nationalist-religious ideology as the core of 1990s politics. The films paint the interconnection between the actual problems and the dominating ideological discourse in society. The problem of violence and crime in *Wounds* is shown to be directly connected to nationalist hysteria and a pro-war discourse which involved a public celebration of violence. The spirit of the *Memorandum* and the



nationalist discourse of the late 1980s is expressed in both films. The attitudes of the main characters reflect this discourse: their actions are influenced and directed by the ideology, and they often wear symbols that are a visual statement of their convictions.

The war is represented as a conflict of former neighbours (*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*), people who speak the same language, share the same cultural and social values and have more commonalities than differences. Influenced by media propaganda and the rise of nationalism they become aware of their differences, embodied in their religious and national belonging. Regardless of the fact that these characters were not practising religion but lived in the ideology of “brotherhood and fraternity”, their national and religious identity becomes a central issue and also a point of their divorce. From this point *the other* (my italics) is always perceived as a foreigner, a mythological enemy who has to be terminated. The process of alienation is shown to be a consequence of the crash of ideology of Tito's Yugoslavia.

The nationalist-religious ideology is depicted in films as an aggressive *vox-populi* ideology of exclusion. The films show the development of this discourse almost chronologically through the rise of nationalist hysteria in the early 1990s: in *Wounds* masses throwing flowers on the tanks going to Croatia; in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* the depiction of the first day of the Bosnian war and moving on to the changes in the public sphere after the Dayton Peace agreement. As discussed in previous chapters, some of the characters express disappointment with the collapse of the nationalist plans and Milosevic's politics. Interestingly, both films end in the post-Dayton era in Serbia.

#### 7.1.2. (A) New Identities in a Changing Ideological Context

The nationalist-religious ideology of the 1990s is closely connected to the question of identity, in fact its role, we may say, was also to offer a new sense of identity after the collapse of communism. We can see that the sense of identity, of *who I am* as an

individual and *to whom I belong* as a social individual, strongly depended on ideology. The collapse of Yugoslavia's ideology of “brotherhood and fraternity” opened up a new ideological arena which would enable self-determination of an individual as a part of a wider social group. The return to tradition, to the Church and the nation, represented a reconstruction of Serbian identity. Nationalist-religious ideology appears as a substitute for the previous socialist ideology.<sup>4</sup> Socialism was criticized and replaced by nationalism. These narratives, which play an important role in the construction of national identities, Igor Krstic recognizes as “fictional realities”, which are nonetheless “crucial for the way an individual understands him - or herself, how he or she is entangled in a society's self-representation, and how a certain cultural or social group determines its collective perception of self and others...”<sup>5</sup> Nationalist-religious ideology as a dominant social narrative provided a “mirror for group identification”<sup>6</sup> and in that sense was crucial for homogenization of Serbian society. The films depicted this problem, for example through the characters of ex-Yugoslav Army colonels, in *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* and *Wounds* the director paints the transformation of their identity, from Yugoslav to Serb nationalist.

Another theme that emerges in the films and that connects to the perception of national identity is the issue of *historical memory* (my italics). Most of the films discussed, such as *Underground*, *Deserter*, *Premeditated Murder* tackled the problem of recent Yugoslav history. This is not unusual since the so-called unresolved historical issues, traumatic experiences of World War II and the communist period became the subject of the public discussions from the late 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Films provided diverse perspectives on this issue. *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* for example, provides an almost sentimental picture of Tito's Yugoslavia. This depiction of the communist past subverts the present nationalist madness of the 1990s. These depictions of the two different periods are closely connected to the problem of

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup> Krstic, Igor: *Re-thinking Serbia: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture*. *Other Voices*, v.2, n.2 (March 2002)

<http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/krstic/>; Last accessed: 11/11/2008

<sup>6</sup> Krstic, Igor: *Ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> See chapter 3.

Serbian self-perception. This problem is depicted in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, through the story of two main characters separated by the war. The flashbacks to their childhood in Tito's Yugoslavia suggest that their personal crisis is caused by the simultaneous loss of friendship and of country. The absurdity of war is emphasized as the film continuously reminds its audience of commonalities between two nationalities, Serbs and Muslims, and their common social and cultural identity in Bosnia built on experience of life together. One of the questions that film opens up is what is actually the identity of the main characters, are they truly nationalists or are they people who with the escalation of the war have lost their identities?

*Wounds* on the other hand pictures the problem of identity through the conflict of Tito's generation and the post-Tito generation. The main characters, two youngsters, identify with criminals who are a byproduct of the regime. This identification results in the two boys turning into criminals. On the other hand the films show the problem of glorification of criminals in the public sphere, who tended to present themselves as Orthodox Serbs who fight for their land and people in the "spirit of Lazar."<sup>8</sup> The self-identification of criminals with historical figures, was allowed by the mythological discourse of the regime, which aimed to legitimize them as true Serb heroes.<sup>9</sup> This issue, strongly depicted in the films, therefore can not be observed outside of the ideological context, as the nationalist-religious ideology – described in detail in chapter 3, allowed the creation of what might be called *collective fantasy* (my italics). "Such fantasies", as Krstic argues, "play a vital role in the construction of identity through their capacity to engage individual objects and mediate contradictory cultural or social discourses."<sup>10</sup> I argue that the films offered a deeper insight into the ideological discourse of the 1990s by providing an understanding of how the ideology was directly related to the question of identity. This aspect cannot be considered without understanding the Serbian context, which is one of the reasons why I argue that the reading of the film will often depend on knowledge of its

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<sup>8</sup> This refers to Lazar Hrebeltanovic from the Kosovo Battle. See chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> The best example is the case of Zeljko Raznatovic Arkan, discussed in previous chapters, who liked to present himself as a Serbian defender while the state kept his criminal activities secret. The same applies to Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic who were celebrated and presented as war heroes.

<sup>10</sup> Krstic, Igor: *Ibid*.

specific sociocultural and political context.

The issue of identity, tackled in Serbian films as a part of a wider exploration of political ideology, involves the question of *how we see others* and *how others see us* (my italics). The identification of characters with mythological figures created a perception of others as enemies, but not just any enemies. The enemies are a part of this mythological discourse: they are referred to as “Turks” or “ustashe.”<sup>11</sup> In other words the enemy is also a traditional one, which leaves an impression of some kind of traditional-Balkan conflict, which was how the regime tried to present it. Here we see the importance of ideological discourse built on national and religious myths and their political purpose. Within this discourse, we can conclude, the perception of others, is always based on self-perception as discussed earlier.

The perception of *how others see us* (my italics), is explored in particular in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. *Others* here refers primarily to foreign, Western audiences. *Audiences* (my italics) is a word which perfectly describes the Serbian perception of Western involvement in the Yugoslav crisis. For Serbs, Westerners represent an audience, so-called spectators of the war, who do not understand much but are willing to stereotype the sides in the conflict through their media. This problem is shown through the character of the American journalist and her interaction with Serbs trapped in the tunnel. The camera's eye, that records Serbs, provides us with a number of stereotypes of self representation, that are based on the outsider's gaze. The film narrative provides a number of stereotypes of the Balkans people. The outsider's gaze coexists mainly from stereotypes of the “Wild Balkan man”, that Frederick Jameson discussed. The film reflects anxiety over marginalisation, of “how others see us”, which at the same time is ridiculed. Iordanova argued that this seemed like an attempt by Serbs to justify themselves to the foreign audience who, they assumed, stereotyped Serbs<sup>12</sup>, or as some of the characters said “as we all came from Hitler.” I suggest that the film depicts Serbian frustration with the West but at the same time this offers a subversion of both local and Western stereotypes. Serbs are

11 *Ustashe* were militant fascists in the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War.

12 Iordanova, Dina: *Cinema of Flames*, London: British Film Institute, 2001, p. 156.

obviously aware of these stereotypes and as one of the critics said, they confirm: we are like that and we love it. Religion played an important role in reconstruction of the Serbian national identity. In the next part therefore we will look at how the films particularly dealt with religion and how they inform us about the role of the Orthodox religion in the political ideology of the 1990s.

#### 7.1.2. (B) How do the Films Inform us about Orthodox Religion in Serbia during the 1990s?

Since chapters 5 and 6 included discussion of cinematic representation of religion, here I outline the final remarks regarding these representations, in order to consider how the films inform us about religion in the 1990s. First it is useful to recall that religion and religious issues in the films analysed are represented in three ways: through dialogue, through images and through *mise-en-scene*. Religious elements in films are not intrusive, rather they are integrated into the story. The populist discourse shaped in the public sphere in the late 1980s, that to be a real Serb inevitably involves belonging to Orthodoxy, is reflected in the films. Religion defines national belonging and vice versa, to be a part of one nation inevitably involved belonging to this particular religion. Religion is connected to the sense of national belonging and in particular to nationalism. The rise of religious awareness in the former Yugoslavia takes place with the first signs of national tensions. This is depicted in the film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, from the very beginning of the film and before the escalation of conflict, where religious differences are emphasized in the dialogue of the characters. Throughout the film the religiousness of the characters, when it is shown, is represented as a source of hate towards “others”, as an expression of superstitious performances and beliefs, rather than as an illustrator of their spirituality.

This spirit of the late 1980s, when the hegemonization of Serbs took place, is reflected in the opening scene of *Wounds*, and the “explosion” of nationalist and religious images as an introduction to the story. In both films religious images are

always connected to national symbols, which shows their transformation from sacred to socio-political statements. Serbian nationalism had its iconography, which films depict as a blend of religious and fascist symbols, whose public function was to create an idea of the ultimate unity of Serbian people under the program “God-king-householder”<sup>13</sup>, except that the “king” was replaced by the Milosevic regime, who nevertheless at the beginning of the 1990s had an almost iconic status even for the Church. Parallels to the *Kosovo Myth* are inevitable, the Serbian nation is under threat and needs to be saved, and such a crucial moment demands unity – all the elements that Milosevic used to promote his political program in 1989. As described in chapter 3, Milosevic was perceived almost as a kind of “national messiah” whose role was to start the final liberation of Serbs and unify them under the umbrella of national unity and Orthodoxy. Although Milosevic himself was not a religious person, in the early stages of his rise to power he used religion as a helpful political weapon. At this time religion was promoted in the public sphere. In the films therefore religion appears as a part of the national self-identification. Both the images and dialogues in the films testify to this ideological discourse.

Orthodoxy proved to be an inevitable element in the depiction of Serbian nationalism, which the director identified as a “deviation of religion.” Religion and nationalism are shown to be directly connected to violence and crime. People whose public image was created to present them as national symbols were those who were in fact directly responsible for war atrocities and criminalization of society.

In *Wounds* religious images are used as a part of the *mise-en-scene* and have different connotations. The decadence of the criminal life style which became a role model for the young generation of the 1990s is criticized through the use of some of the Christian iconic images. The director paints the culture of the 1990s as a culture of self-destruction through the *mise-en-scene* in which the image of the *Last Supper* has a central role. The unity around Christ is replaced with the unity around the “false messiah”, in this case the teacher of the young criminals. They are not aware

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter 3.

of Christ as such, and this sacramental image has the opposite meaning. The unity sealed with blood, in the graveyard, shows that there is no salvation for the characters. Even the five wounds that the characters inflict on each other, which inevitably recall Christ's wounds, have no Christian meaning whatsoever. Rather these metaphors point to the final degradation of Serbian society, which is painted as a culture of *thanatos*.

To conclude, the analysis of the films shows that religion is represented as an integral part of nationalist ideology, for which reason we can speak of it as nationalist-religious ideology. The cinematic depiction of religious images and symbols, therefore, indirectly informs us about the role of Orthodoxy and the Church in the political context of the 1990s. This reflects the way that Orthodox representatives did not resist the nationalist ideology or the society's culture of violence, but on the contrary supported this discourse seeing it as a return to Serbian tradition and faith after years of communism. The attitudes of some of the Church leaders had a great impact on society and fueled an important part of the discourse for the justification of the conflict and its promotion as a just war. Images such as the one of an Orthodox cross and the gun in the film, illustrate the consequences of such political stances. The representation of religion and religious symbols in the films have a metaphoric function, which with careful analysis can inform us about the disintegration of Serbian society under the Milosevic regime and the political ideology based on "hate speech", violence and exclusion.

#### 7.1.2. (C) Media Propaganda and the Promotion of Ideology

Media propaganda is in the spotlight in both films. As discussed in chapter 3, the media had a crucial role in the promotion of the regime's ideology. Nationalist-religious discourse was spread through the major state media, such as *Politika* newspapers and Radio-Television Serbia. The role of the media in the political regime of the 1990s is depicted in the films *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* and *Wounds*, in two ways: first in spreading war propaganda and second in shaping the

new cultural milieu of the 1990s. Media manipulation is explored especially in *Wounds*, where the director portrays the huge influence of the regime's media. The media were the bearers of Milosevic's politics and they reveal the characteristics of his political discourse. In this sense we may say that before the conflict escalated, the war first began in the media, through the massive production of "hate speech." Milosevic's media had a central role in the promotion of a number of stereotypes about "others", which are clearly depicted in *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, where Croats and Bosnian Muslims are always represented as armed enemies who are attacking brave and innocent Serbian people. By using this mythological discourse the media represented Serbs as traditional victims of traditional enemies, revoking slavery under the Ottoman Empire and the genocide in Croatia in the Second World War. The West is again conceptualized as a sociocultural space ruled by a political elite who want to impose a "New World Order" on the Serbian nation.<sup>14</sup> These stereotypes about the West which promoted the so-called conspiracy theory that the world was against the Serbs, had political purposes: to embrace the country's isolation as a positive step, and to embrace Milosevic as a leader with an aura of the mythological hero who would resist this colonization. This is also one of the similarities between the political discourse and the discourse developed within the Church, which shows that the political ideology of the 1990s had its roots in previously developed assumptions. Media propaganda tended to portray the war as a just war. Nationalist-religious ideology was at the heart of this discourse and it provided perfect grounds for such a portrayal.

The sites of war and destruction that emerged in the public sphere with the escalation of the conflict not only indoctrinated the audience but also distracted it from the growing social and economic problems: the inflation and economic crisis were explained by the war and by the embargo unjustly imposed by the West. At the same time as an alternative to war scenes and destruction with which television bombarded the audiences on a daily basis, the media offered a concept of cheap entertainment developed in other regime-backed stations. Entertainment programs represented a

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<sup>14</sup> See chapters 5 and 6.



form of anesthetic for the masses, offering a picture of wealth and stability, reserved for the more skillful population. In other words, the poor citizens were persuaded to understand their poverty to be a result of their inability to produce money. The role models became folk-singers and criminals whose life style was offered as a model of success. These programs formed a new aesthetic recognized as an aesthetic of the 1990s. The new cultural milieu of Milosevic's Serbia created the so-called turbo-folk culture, which was actually a part of the political program of the regime. The depiction of turbo-folk culture as a political project of the 1990s and its impact on society are shown in *Wounds*.

The cinematic depiction of the media in the 1990s shows that the media had a key role in spreading war propaganda and that they were the main promoters of nationalist-religious ideology. From 1989 religious and national themes prevailed in the media, which were shaping public opinion and which aimed to strengthen Milosevic's political program. Both films depict the discourse of strong war propaganda when showing the content of the regime's media, mainly Television of Serbia.

To summarize, Serbian film of the 1990s was strongly engaged with the socio-political context of its time. The films depicted some of the most important issues of Serbian society, in the first place the civil war, but also the problems of violence, crime, isolation, economic collapse and the impacts that they had on the people. I have argued that *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* and *Wounds* inform us about these problems in particular, depicting the ideological discourse of the 1990s. The two Dragojevic films show the growing problems of the Serbian society and the civil war to be a result of the political ideology of the 1990s. I argue that Serbian films depicted the political ideology of the 1990s as a nationalist-religious ideology. Not only that, the films also showed the main characteristics of this ideology, from its discourse and promotion in the public sphere to the portrayal of its ultimate impact on local people. This depiction is to be found both in film text and in the images. I argue that these films were not just mirroring existing problems, but that they pointed

to the ideological discourse of the regime as a cause of these problems.

## 7.2. Cinematic Subversion of the Regime's Ideology

In this thesis I have analysed different forms of cinematic subversion of ideology. This includes subversion through the use of film narratives, characterizations and symbols. As we have seen these subversive cinematic portrayals are more ambiguous than first meets the eye, as was demonstrated in my discussions of the critical reception of films during this period. I consider the films I have analysed to be films of subversion. In the first place I make a distinction between films of resistance and films of subversion, following in the footsteps of scholars such as Dusan Bjelic.<sup>15</sup> Bjelic characterized as films of resistance those films with an authentic artistic expression within the national cinematography, which as such resist and reject the cultural and ideological forms and stereotypes of the cultural context in which they are made. The *Black Wave* movement, in Bjelic's opinion, is an example of this. I discussed the *Black Wave* in this thesis because of its political and cultural importance, wanting to emphasize the importance of this cinematic tradition which to a significant extent influenced later directors. Resistance however should not be taken in an oversimplified way. As I mentioned previously these films were not simply criticizing the totalitarian socialist regime and its corruption but to a great extent they can be considered as films which explored ideologies, providing criticism of Western capitalism as much as Eastern communism. Such cinematic contemplations bear witness to the golden age of cinema that started a tradition of film as social and political critique. Precisely because of its socio-critical engagement with the world it is not surprising that this period is considered as "Pericles' golden age of Yugoslav culture."<sup>16</sup>

Bjelic on the other hand identified as subversive films those which are influenced by

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<sup>15</sup> Bjelic, Dusan: "Global Aesthetics and the Serbian Cinema of the 1990s" in Imre, Aniko (ed.): *East European Cinemas*, New York, London: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> *Intervju: Filip David: Srbija Dobrice Cosica nije porazena*, <http://www.naslovi.net/2008-11-24/e-novine/srbija-dobrice-cosica-nije-porazena/927390>; Last accessed: 27/01/2009.

or are communicating within the commonly found aesthetics and stereotypes, but nevertheless at the same time subvert some of these stereotypes. I argue that subversiveness can be identified in several areas. Subversion does not take place only in aesthetic forms but also in the film text. Since every film is framed by its context I argue that it is not necessary for a film to be completely outside of its contextual discourse in order to be subversive. Rather, films which have adopted some of the ideological assumptions still have the potential to express subversive elements through the self-reflection and exploration of the context from which they are speaking. While in the case of the *Black Wave* for example we might say it was relatively easy to define resistance, how do we identify subversiveness in the selected films of the 1990s?

If we are only looking for complete rejection of ideological assumptions and stereotypes in films, we will not find it. This is however not a condition for subversiveness. I suggest it is important to analyse stereotypes and ideological premises in films and reconsider whether they are there only to reflect their political context or to subvert it?

I argued that these films subverted stereotypes. Here I recall some examples: self-representation frequently uses the outsider's point of view, for example the stereotyped representation of the Balkan people as backward group from an area prone to conflict in *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, in order to subvert this stereotype.<sup>17</sup> The representation of others, on the other hand, offers a grotesque picture of "ourselves" primarily, since "the others" are actually absent: the camera's eye does not depict them as real human beings but most of the time as shadows, which suggest that "the others" are mythological creatures, a projection of our own ideological fantasies.<sup>18</sup> Besides playing with stereotyped representations of ourselves and others, the films also play with genre using black comedy which emerges as a sub-genre in

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<sup>17</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>18</sup> In *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* the Bosnian Muslim soldiers are represented as shadows. The Western world on the other hand is represented through the New World Order conspiracy theory. See chapter 5 for more details.

both films. Comedy is often used as a tool of subversion, for example in the visual representation of the news jingle of Radio Television Serbia.<sup>19</sup>

The rhythm of the film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, its montage and style, has been compared to Hollywood style movies, while *Wounds* has been compared to film-noir and Tarantino style films.<sup>20</sup> Both films have elements and influences of the Hollywoodization which influenced Yugoslav cinematography in the post-*Black Wave* period. I argue, however, that although the films could be considered as speaking through Hollywood aesthetics, they still reflect a personal form of expression of the *auteur* who wants to compose his critical vision of reality. Frustration with reality was decisive in structuring the narrative. The subtext of the film coexists from subversive elements, analyzed in this thesis, and subverts again the main text of the film which may appear as ideologically and politically similar to the regime's one. In this way, the director structured the main text of the film through the ideological discourse of the 1990s, but only *to subvert the same discourse* (my italics). Evidence for this argument is that characters in both films speak the “language” of their time, rich in different stereotypes and prejudice from sexism to nationalism, but which is nevertheless subverted in both films.

The representation of war as a mythological cycle, which many scholars took into consideration when it comes to the depiction of the war in Serbian film of the 1990s,<sup>21</sup> is one of the central issues. This is for two reasons. First if we consider that the films support the mythological explanation of the war then it would mean that they do not have a critical point of view of the ideological discourse of its time, which I argue was not the case. Second, the mythological elements and metaphors might be considered as an intentional reflection of society's stereotypes, which can be then another way of subversion. My argument that emerges from the film analysis is

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19 See chapter 6, section 6.4.3. on cinematic depiction of media propaganda.

20 This was discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

21 As previously discussed in chapter 5, this was one of the key problems in reading Serbian film. This concept was discussed by a Serbian scholar Nevena Dakovic. For more details see: Dakovic, Nevena: *Yugoslav Wars: Between Myth and Reality*, <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/mpi/conference/dakovic.htm>; Last accessed 1/12/2008.

that the second is most likely the case, since the whole narrative *is* based on a stereotyped ideological perception of reality, which is constantly ridiculed and subverted in the films. I argue that the films, especially *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, which is set on the battlefield, did not suggest a mythological concept of the war, because as my analysis shows there are many pointers in the film that suggest that the Milosevic regime was responsible for the war, from the representation of the character of Sloba, the war profiteer with a name that echoes that of Milosevic, to the clear depiction of nationalist discourse and media propaganda.

Scholars such as Nevena Dakovic referred to the “ogre from the tunnel” metaphor as a metaphor used to represent the mythological cause of the war. According to the director an ogre metaphor is used primarily to describe a primitivism and lack of knowledge in the rural areas where intolerance of any kind can be generally found.<sup>22</sup> The director seems to make a claim that people from such areas in former Yugoslavia were easier targets for political manipulation. The “ogre in the tunnel” is a central site around which representatives of different political options gather to deliver their ideological message to these people. An ogre metaphor becomes in this way also a symbol for false ideologies, which seem to be destined to collapse in the Balkan area. This metaphor can also be understood as a depiction of the regime's official explanation of the war founded and built upon local mythologies. Mythological aspects of the regime's discourse are as we have seen subverted in various ways: the atrocities of the Serbian soldiers, their deviant religiousness and personal morals represent a subversion of the official representation of Serbian warriors as brave heroes.

The naivety of the soldiers, the depiction of their human side, in the opinion of some scholars, represented an attempt to provoke the sympathy of the audience for obvious villains.<sup>23</sup> The representation of the human side of the villains, however can be seen as a depiction closer to reality. The director avoids using a classical Hollywood approach of what is known as “good cop - bad cop” in painting the characters. In fact

<sup>22</sup> See chapter 5, section 5.2. on critical reception of *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*.

<sup>23</sup> See discussion in chapter 5, section 5.2.

the film reveals the possibility of a situation in which so-called “ordinary” people, when indoctrinated, can commit appalling atrocities. War crimes are made possible by a system which at the same time makes a profit from the war and the lack of order. We could argue that such a representation tends to deconstruct the stereotype of Serbs as a nation that embraces genocide, taking into account that the atrocities happen when the society's ideology supports them and when concrete political structures profit from it. The undoubted naivety of some of the characters in embracing the ideological framework turns them in the end into the victims as much as their enemies. Still, this does not mean that the film equates victims and villains but rather asks the question who is the real villain, only the one who pulls the trigger or those who created and promoted the ideology of the war?

The narrative of *Wounds* is structured similarly but in this film it is much clearer and easier than in *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, which because of the war theme that it explores from such recent a historical perspective, the critics put in the category of politically incorrect film.<sup>24</sup> In my analysis I found that *Wounds* nonetheless contains the same national and religious images and symbols as *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*, which are even connected in the same context: through the depiction of the expansion of nationalism which is portrayed through euphoria and the hysterical state of the masses.

The representation of religion, through powerful images such as the cross and the gun, represent on the other hand a direct subversion of religion of that time, which instead of reconciliator became a motivator for nationalist conflicts and therefore war. Even if such a depiction of religion in the film was just mirroring the iconography of 1990s society, this image still represents a subversion of religion – since the sacramental symbol of the cross deviates from being a symbol of peace and salvation to a symbol of hate and extinction. It is useful to recall that the director stated that he was occupied with religion inasmuch as he wanted to show its nationalist connotation and therefore degradation. To conclude, the Serbian films

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<sup>24</sup> See Iordanova, Dina: *Ibid*, p. 146. See also discussion in chapter 2, section 2.3.2. on studies on Serbian cinema of the 1990s, and chapter 5, section 5.2.

portrayed the dominant ideology of Serbian society in a critical way.

It is important to remember that these are ambiguous films. My choice to explore the subversiveness of relatively controversial films appeared as a difficult choice which has required the application of a multi-dimensional methodological approach to the problem. Because of the ambiguity, these films as previously mentioned were frequently considered by scholars and critics to be *politically incorrect films* (my italics).<sup>25</sup> This is a definition against which I argue in this thesis, for several reasons. One of the reasons is that the diverse and often extreme attitudes of the critics shows that such categorization of *politically correct and incorrect film* is not possible in the first place. Second, such categorization is dangerous and not always applicable when it comes to the arts and artistic expressions of reality. The final reason is that such oversimplified definitions are untenable as suggested by my analysis which shows that films are far more complex. In considering the film's aesthetics, film genre, and film narrative we testify to its vivid ambiguity. This ambiguity qualifies these as films which framed the ideology but were at the same time framed by the ideology. In other words they criticize and subvert the ideological assumptions of the 1990s while they also inevitably reflect some of those assumptions (such as is the case with the portrayal of war demonstrators) as a product of their time. This does not negate their subversiveness, since subversiveness is not found in strong political anti-propaganda statements, but on the contrary in films that speak within a certain ideological frame, that were influenced and shaped by it, but at the same time play with those issues and criticize the discourse that surrounds them.

### **7.3. Concluding Remarks**

In this thesis I have used a multi-dimensional cultural studies approach in order to propose an alternative reading and better understanding of Serbian cinema of the 1990s. In the focus of this thesis is the issue of the nationalist-religious ideology of the 1990s and its cinematic depiction. It is important to say that my aim was not to

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<sup>25</sup> See discussion in chapter 2; See also discussion on critical reception of the film in chapter 5.

claim that this political ideology was the only cause of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia but rather to emphasize its importance in the escalation and justification of the conflict. In this sense I argue that the films manifested a similar attempt. Unlike other scholars who claimed that the films were offering their view on the causes of the conflict I argued that the films were rather pointing to the ideological context which supported the conflict and allowed the development of “hate speech” and politics of exclusion. The films are told from the Serbian perspective, which does not mean they are taking the Serbian side, but that they are dealing *with* the Serbian side and its responsibility in embracing such an ideological concept. The fact that the films are told primarily through the Serbian gaze is important as it informs us more about the issues and stereotypes and most of all about the impact of ideology on the people and therefore on the films. In this sense, I argue that the films serve as a rich resource for studying Serbian society and the ideological concepts of the 1990s culture.

One of the reasons for the films' diverse reception was, as already mentioned, in the ambiguity of the films. This ambiguity lies in the fact that the films not only depicted but also at the same time reflected the context in which they occurred. Depiction in this sense means intentional and often critical representation of the ongoing issues, while reflection means that the films by default being from this specific context adopt and speak within a certain discourse without recognizing that they are also a product of the criticized context. I argued that in spite of this we need to acknowledge that even a film framed by its local ideologies (and which film is not?) can speak subversively of its context. Therefore the understanding of this specific socio-cultural and political context represented an important aspect for the film analysis, for which reason this thesis commences with an analysis of the socio-political background.

The analysis of the films revealed many issues that the films depicted and that were strongly related to the context explored. The analysis of their critical reception showed that scholars and critics were usually focused only on the main topic, such as



the war, and overlooked the other issues connected to this main topic.<sup>26</sup> The elements they overlooked, such as the representation of religion and nationalism, inform us strongly about the context of the Serbian society but also about the character of the films and the extent to which they were critically engaged with the ongoing problems. These representations are a form of cinematic depiction of the cultural matrix of Serbian society and as such they show that films were not just mirroring but exploring the causes of the war and the collapse that was surrounding them.

To sum up, in this thesis I investigated how the films inform us about the ideological discourse of the 1990s and therefore about Serbian society under the Milosevic regime. My analysis of the cinematic depiction of the political ideology was focused upon the exploration of the nationalist-religious ideology found in the films. On the basis of my findings I proposed that the representations of the national and religious elements in the films constitute a critical statement on the nature and characteristics of the dominant ideology, whose main elements are at the same time subverted. In this sense, I argued that subversiveness is possible when a film is speaking within a very specific ideological context, and even when there is an overlap between cinematic discourse and society's discourse. I suggested in this thesis that the Serbian films in subversive, though sometimes ambiguous ways, interrogated the political ideology of the Milosevic regime.

#### **7.4. Questions for Future Research**

This thesis provides a foundation for future research that could develop in diverse ways, from the further exploration of film as a political critique, and topics related to it such as global aesthetics, to the exploration of these films from a theological point of view. Another possible development might be a further exploration of the nationalist-religious ideologies in Serbia and the former Yugoslav region, their characteristics and changes since 2000. Here I briefly consider possible aspects of future research that could be developed from this work.

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<sup>26</sup> See chapters 2, 5 and 6.

#### 7.4.1. Film Studies

This study I believe can make a contribution both to film studies and to an interdisciplinary area of film and religion. First, it proposes the reading of Serbian film in a way that has not been undertaken so far. It points to the necessity of taking into account the national and religious symbols when it comes to analysis of Balkan films, especially in those studies which deal with issues of identity and self-representation or with Balkan film in general, its characteristics and elements that determine it as an cultural entity.

Second, this study encourages further investigation into film as ideological and political critique: how is this criticism expressed in national and global cinema, what are the characteristics of subversion and criticism, how does film use stereotypes, and how does it stand against global hegemony both aesthetically and ideologically? I suggest that film should be studied within its specific cultural and socio-political context and that depending on this, we would be able to identify the global stereotypes implied in local, national cinematographies and the possible subversion of these stereotypes. These are some of the issues that this study proposed and that merit further investigation.

#### 7.4.2. Film and Religion

In the field of film and religion, this study would be a good basis for future research on some of the national cinemas of Eastern Europe and its relation to religious issues, such as in contemporary Russia for example. It would be interesting to look at the number of so-called religious films produced recently in Russia for example, how these connect to the ideological context of society: whether these films criticize or on the contrary promote Orthodoxy as a part of a specific national-political ideology.

#### 7.4.3. Theological Aspects

One aspect that is not considered in this study but that could be developed further on the grounds of this thesis is a theological criticism of the selected films. This aspect is based on the subversive perspectives of religious representation. To criticize the *deviation* (my italics) of religion demonstrates at the same time an awareness of the ideal that has been compromised. In this sense it would be important to consider in future research whether so-called secular film can provide theological critique. It would also be important to consider whether films in this way can perform theology. The issue of corruption is a theological issue, but when this issue is raised in a secular film and against the compromised theology, how do we consider these films? In this sense, it would be useful to develop further audience research and investigate what the audience does with such content, whether it provokes any contemplation on religious deviations and whether this can then represent a form of theological criticism. These are all themes that can be drawn from this study and that could be considered in possible prospective explorations of film as political critique, and in future research in the field of film and religion, which is generally lacking in studies on Eastern European and Balkan Cinema.

#### 7.4.4. Socio-Political Issues

In this study I have offered a significant exploration of the nationalist-religious ideology of 1990s Serbia, its historical and theological aspects, political implications and the impacts it had on society. In the course of the discussion I have suggested the importance and impact that nationalist-religious ideology still have in Serbian society eight years after Milosevic's downfall. Its main supporters can be found in some political parties, in academic structures and in the Church. In many ways this ideological discourse continues to shape crucial political decisions or is used to justify certain political and social events. Therefore it is important to suggest the continuation of studies on this topic, with a methodological approach that would include both the Church and the state and its representations in the public and

popular culture of contemporary Serbia. It would be useful to explore further the role of this ideology in restructuring identities in the post-Milosevic era and in the process of transition to a new European identity. In this sense, it would be interesting to see how this ideology has changed and how it relates to some of the current issues in the region, and what its impact is on the socio-political life in Serbia and consequently on the whole Balkan region.

With regard to all these possible future investigations that could be drawn from this study, I would however suggest two key dimensions which await future research. The first would be on national cinema as a part of global cinema, and its subversive aspects. A good resource for such investigation would be popular Balkan and the Eastern European films which focus upon the issues of *changing identity* (my italics), and its national and religious aspects. Second, I propose the continuation of research on the nationalist-religious ideology in Serbia and the former Yugoslav region, its socio-political role and its representations in modern culture and popular media in the light of the current socio-political and cultural changes of moving towards a more “European identity.”

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